少年サンデーコミックス
Scomics

THE COCKPIT

VOLUME 9

松本零士
LEIJI MATSUMOTO

Shonen Sunday Comics

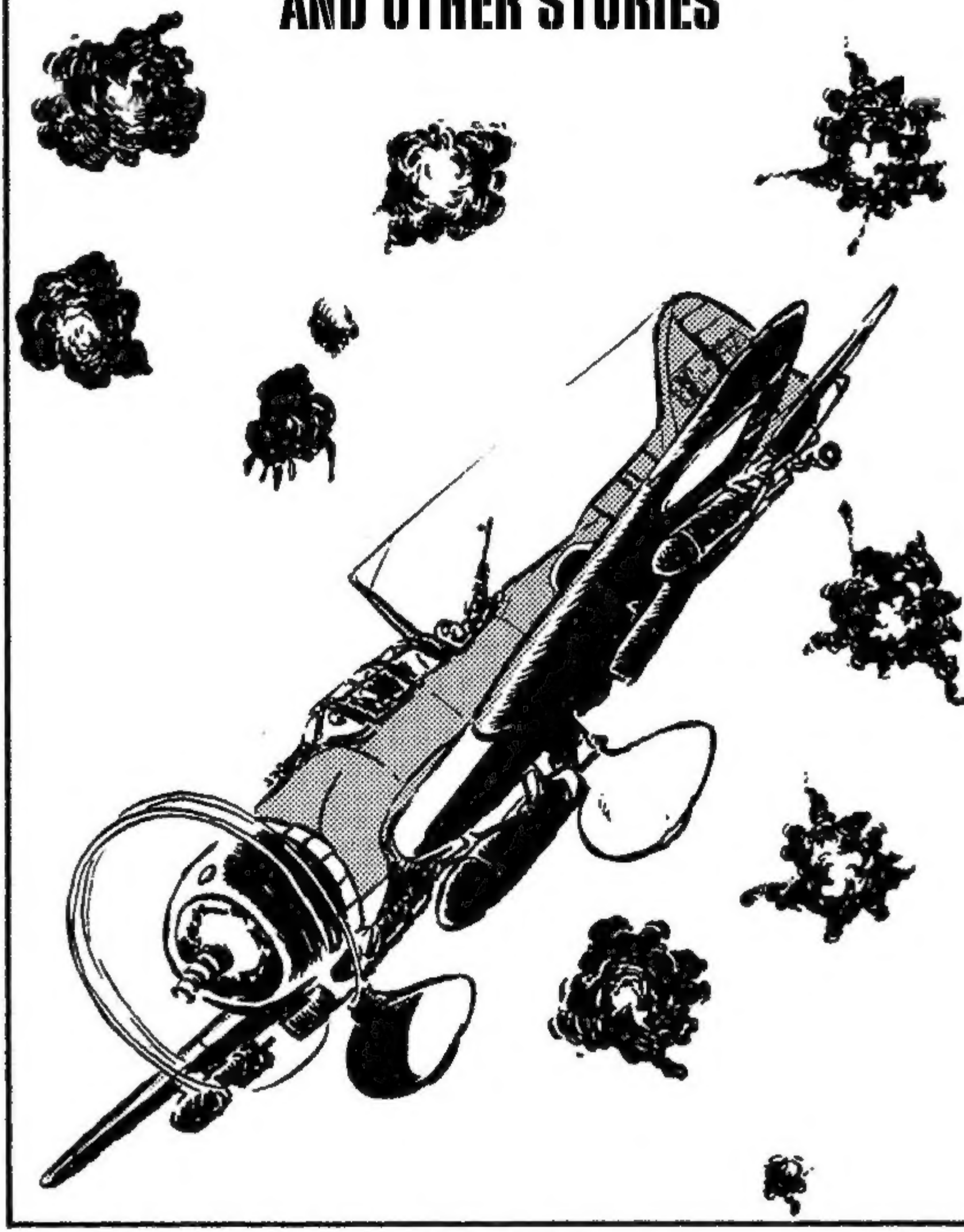
NOTICE!

Japanese comics or *manga* are read from right to left across the page instead of left to right. Also, if your reader supports Japanese *manga* format (back to front instead of front to back) then set it so for easier reading. Thanks!

★ THE COCKPIT - VOLUME ⑨ ★

TRACER BULLET CORRIDOR

AND OTHER STORIES



松本零士／BY L・MATSUMOTO

THE COCKPIT (aka BATTLEFIELD)
Volume 9: Tracer Bullet Corridor and other stories

by Leiji Matsumoto

A Google Translate ® adaptation

English language cleanup
by Richard Mandel

Released in 2026 by fans for fans
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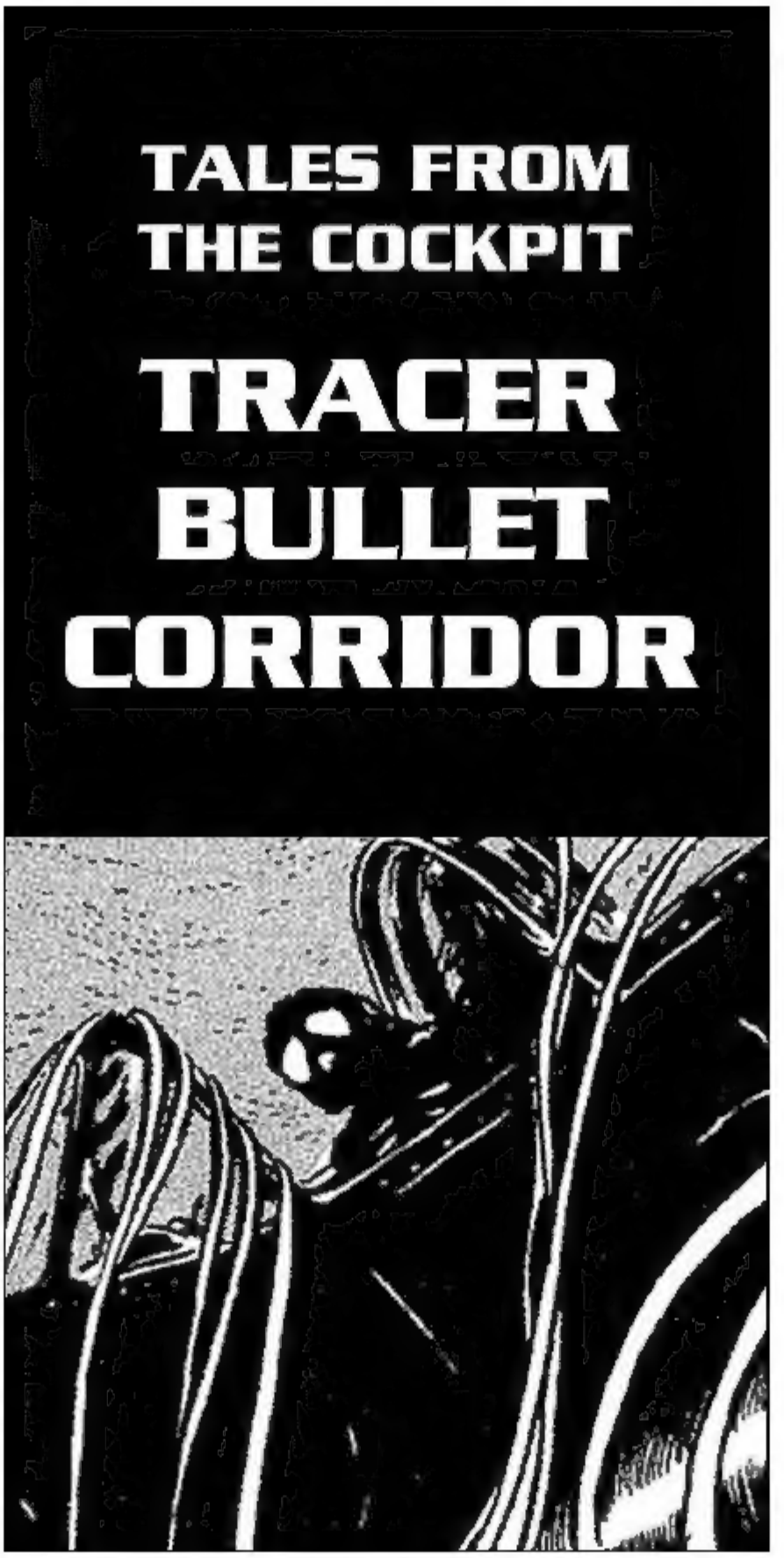
■松本零士■
LEIJI MATSUMOTO

EDITOR'S NOTE

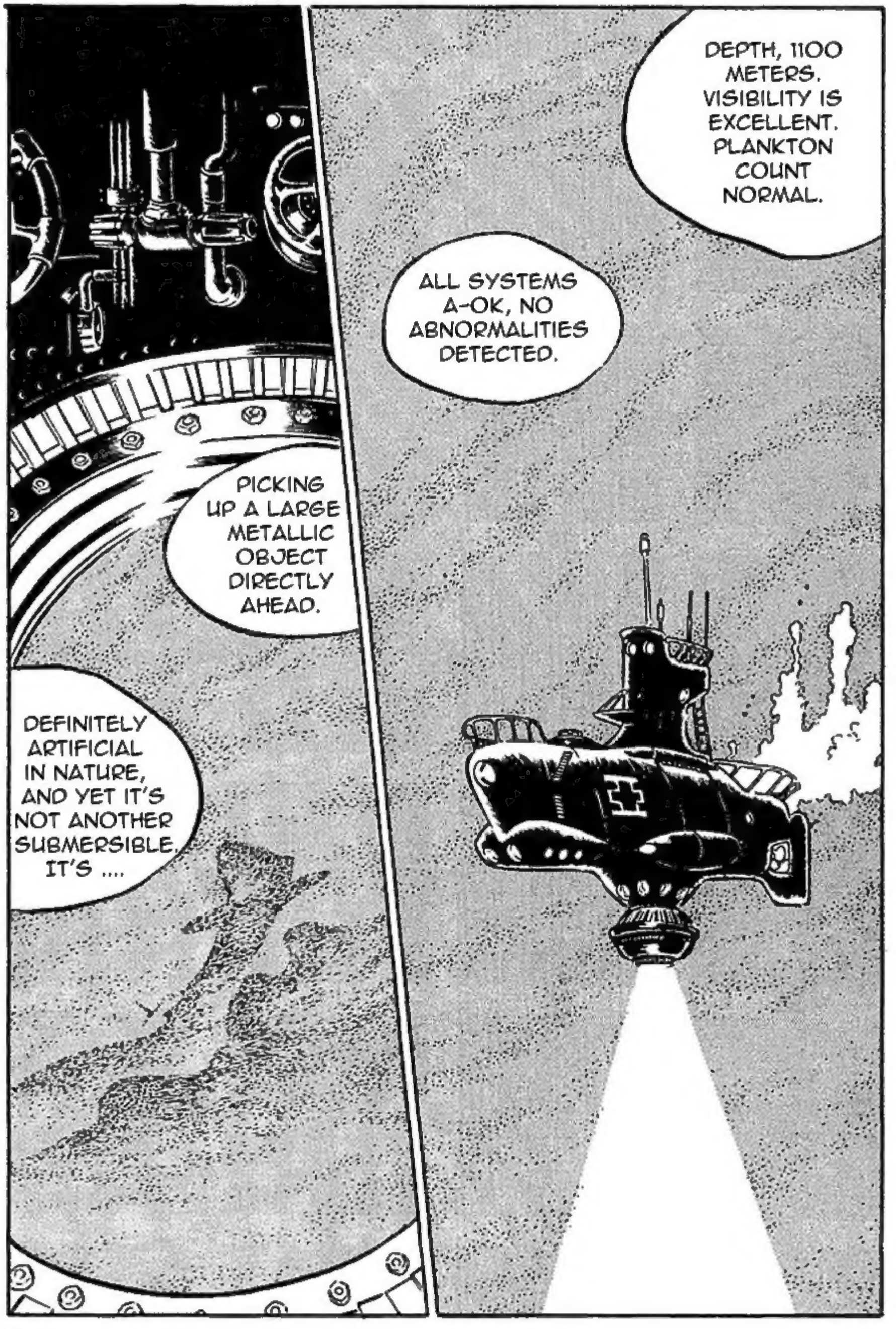
This manga was "scanlated" from the original Japanese by feeding the individual pages through the free Google Translate AI program and then the results cleaned up considerably for better reading by English speaking audiences. Google Translate AI is a far from perfect tool as I write this (2026) but as I said it was free and you can't beat that with a stick. The end results were barely readable and I've had to both rewrite and interpolate considerably in places in order to produce an English adaptation that reads well.

My apologies to all of you who know the language. All I can say is that the rest of us have waited this long for some kind (*any* kind) of English language adaptation of this classic Leiji Matsumoto manga. If you can and are willing to do better then by all means feel free to do so. I won't be offended. I'll enjoy your effort with everyone else who reads it. (R.M.)

These are stories of men, women, and the machines of war.

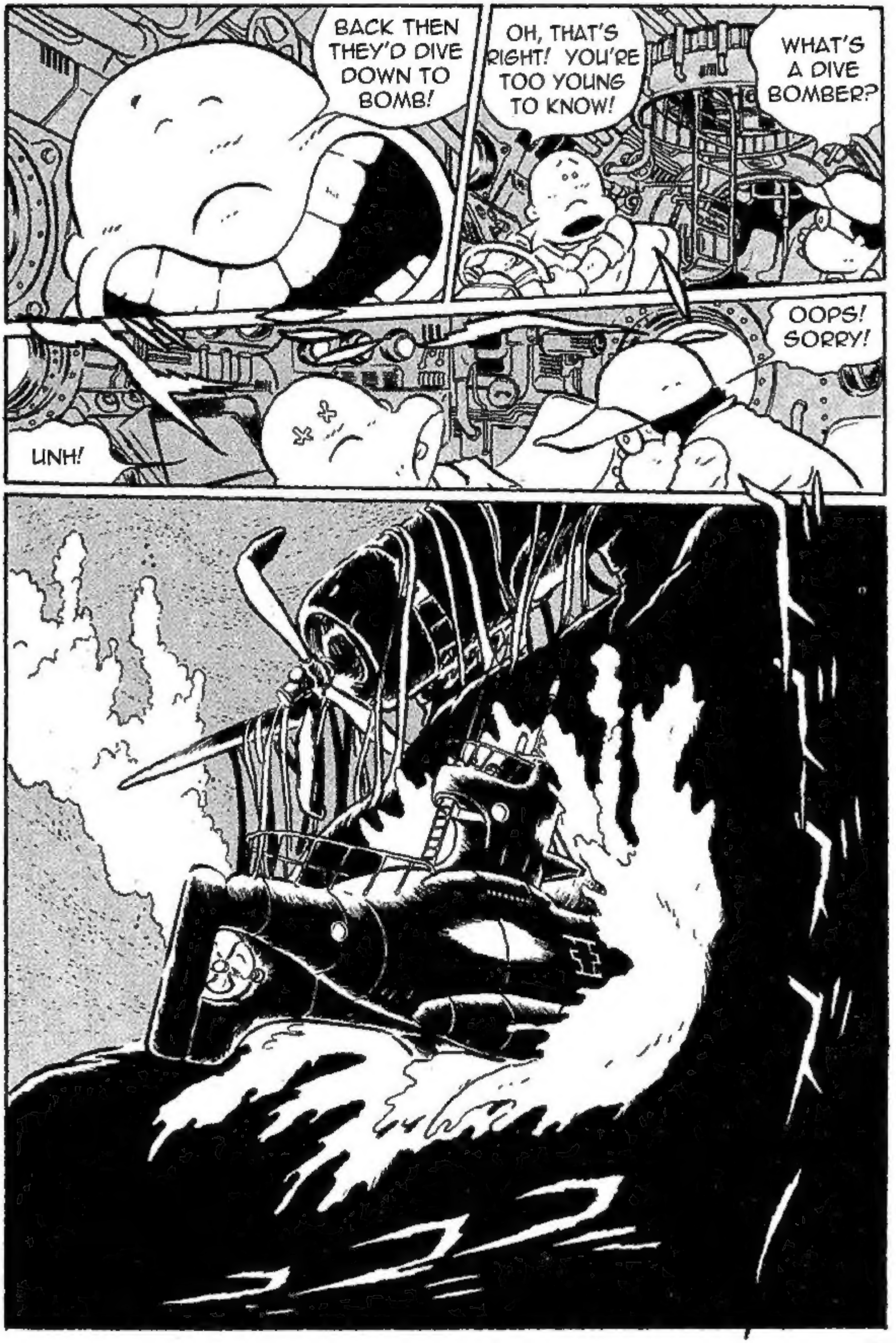

TALES FROM
THE COCKPIT
TRACER
BULLET
CORRIDOR

TRACER BULLET CORRIDOR

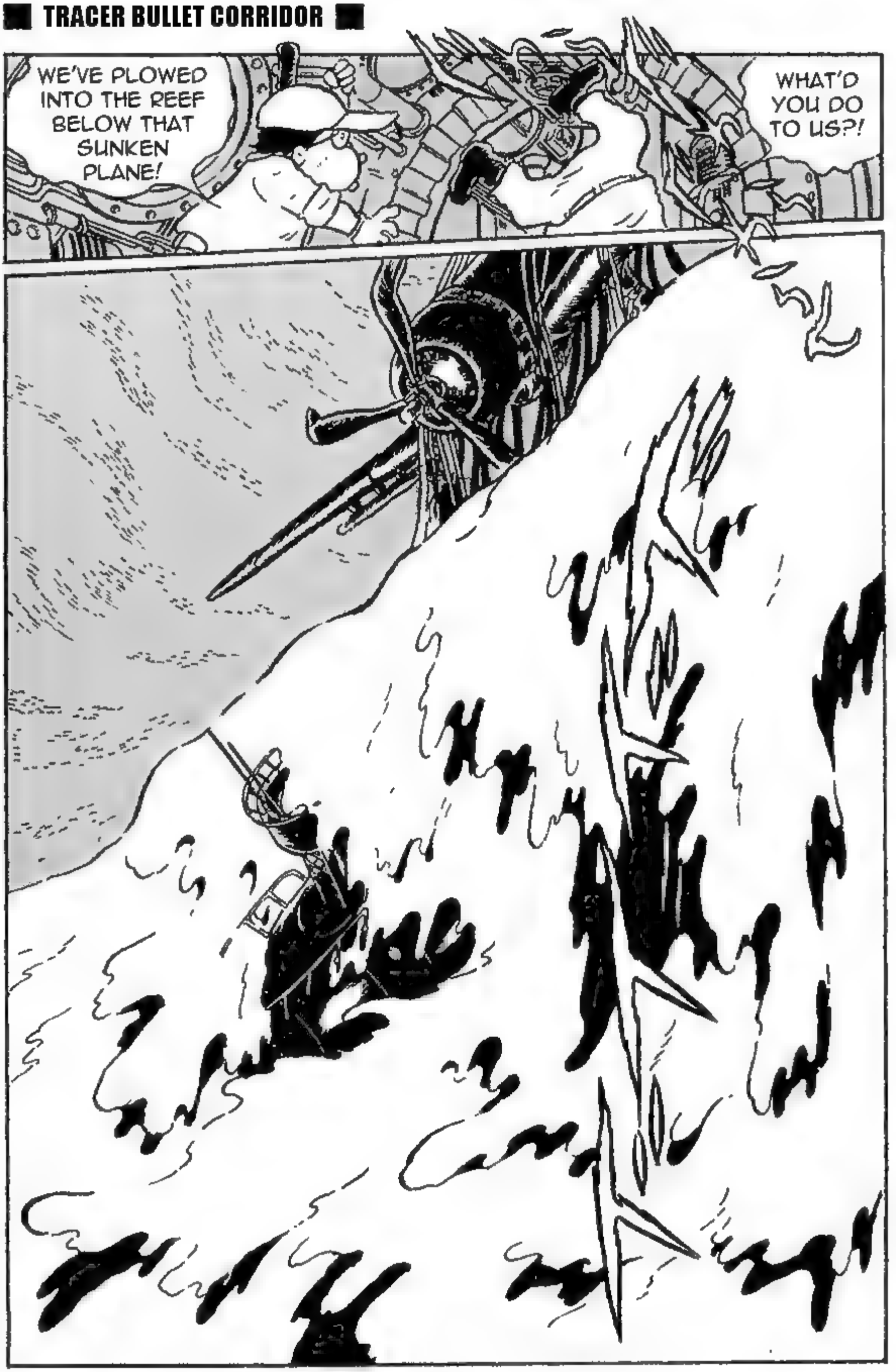

DEPTH, 1100 METERS. VISIBILITY IS EXCELLENT. PLANKTON COUNT NORMAL.
ALL SYSTEMS A-OK, NO ABNORMALITIES DETECTED.
PICKING UP A LARGE METALLIC OBJECT DIRECTLY AHEAD.
DEFINITELY ARTIFICIAL IN NATURE, AND YET IT'S NOT ANOTHER SUBMERSIBLE. IT'S ....

TRACER BULLET CORRIDOR

IT'S AN AIRPLANE! A TYPE 99 AICHI D3A DIVE BOMBER FROM WORLD WAR II! THIS IS INCREDIBLE!


BACK THEN THEY'D DIVE DOWN TO BOMB!
OH, THAT'S RIGHT! YOU'RE TOO YOUNG TO KNOW!
WHAT'S A DIVE BOMBER?
OOPS! SORRY!
UNH!

TRACER BULLET CORRIDOR



FIRST THINGS FIRST. HOW MUCH AIR DO WE HAVE LEFT?

LOOK, I'M SORRY. IT'S MY FAULT WE'RE--

EITHER THAT OR THAT OLD PLANE IS BLOCKING SIGNAL.

IT'S NO GOOD. ALL I'M GETTING IS STATIC. I THINK THE ANTENNA'S BROKEN.

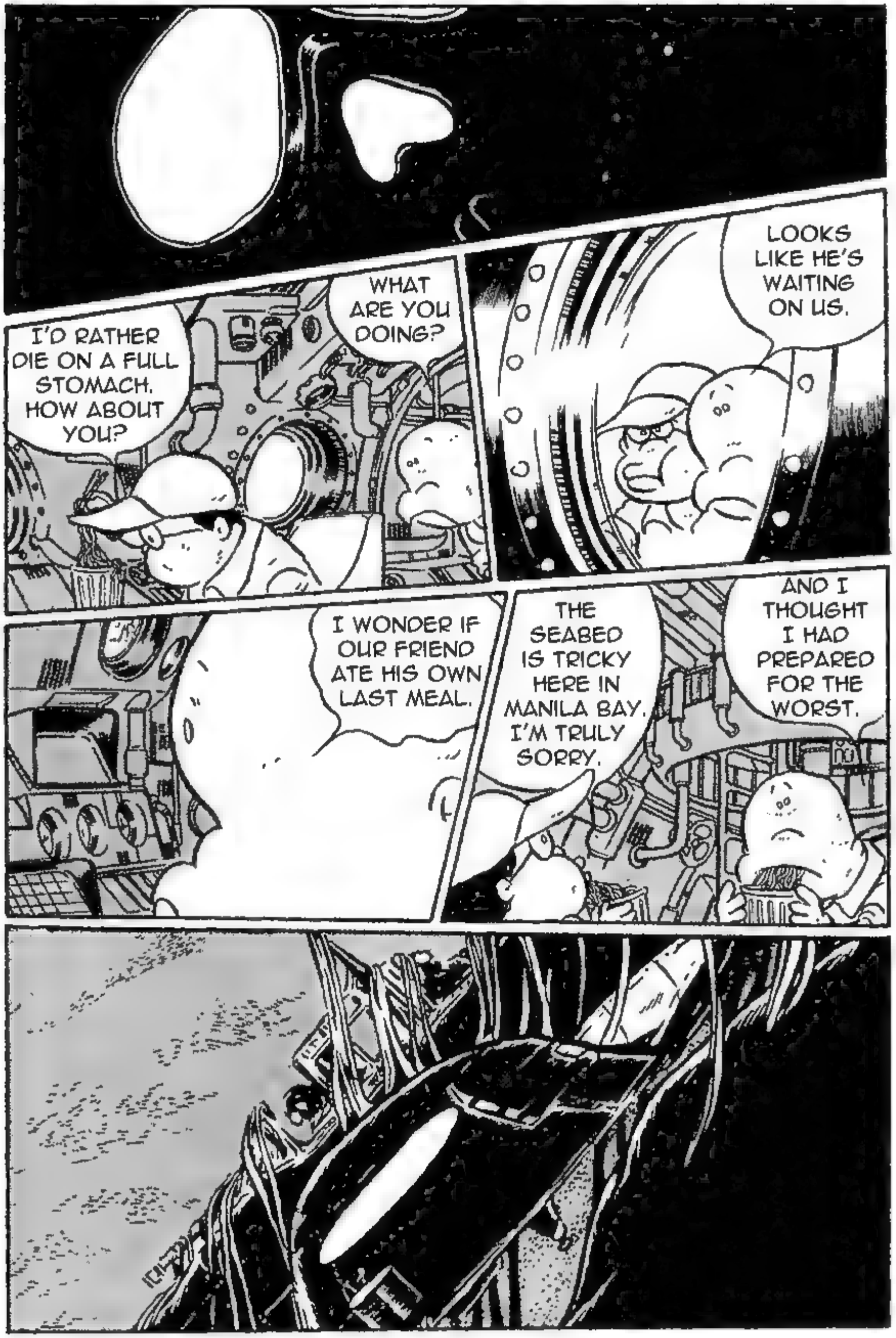
ONLY 30 MINUTES? THAT'S ALL?

... I'D SAY ABOUT 30 MINUTES TOPS.

WITH TWO TANKS BUSTED ...

WELL, OLD FELLA ...

... WE MAY BE JOINING YOU SOON IF WE CAN'T GET FREE.


I'D RATHER DIE ON A FULL STOMACH. HOW ABOUT YOU?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
LOOKS LIKE HE'S WAITING ON US.
I WONDER IF OUR FRIEND ATE HIS OWN LAST MEAL.
THE SEABED IS TRICKY HERE IN MANILA BAY. I'M TRULY SORRY.
AND I THOUGHT I HAD PREPARED FOR THE WORST.

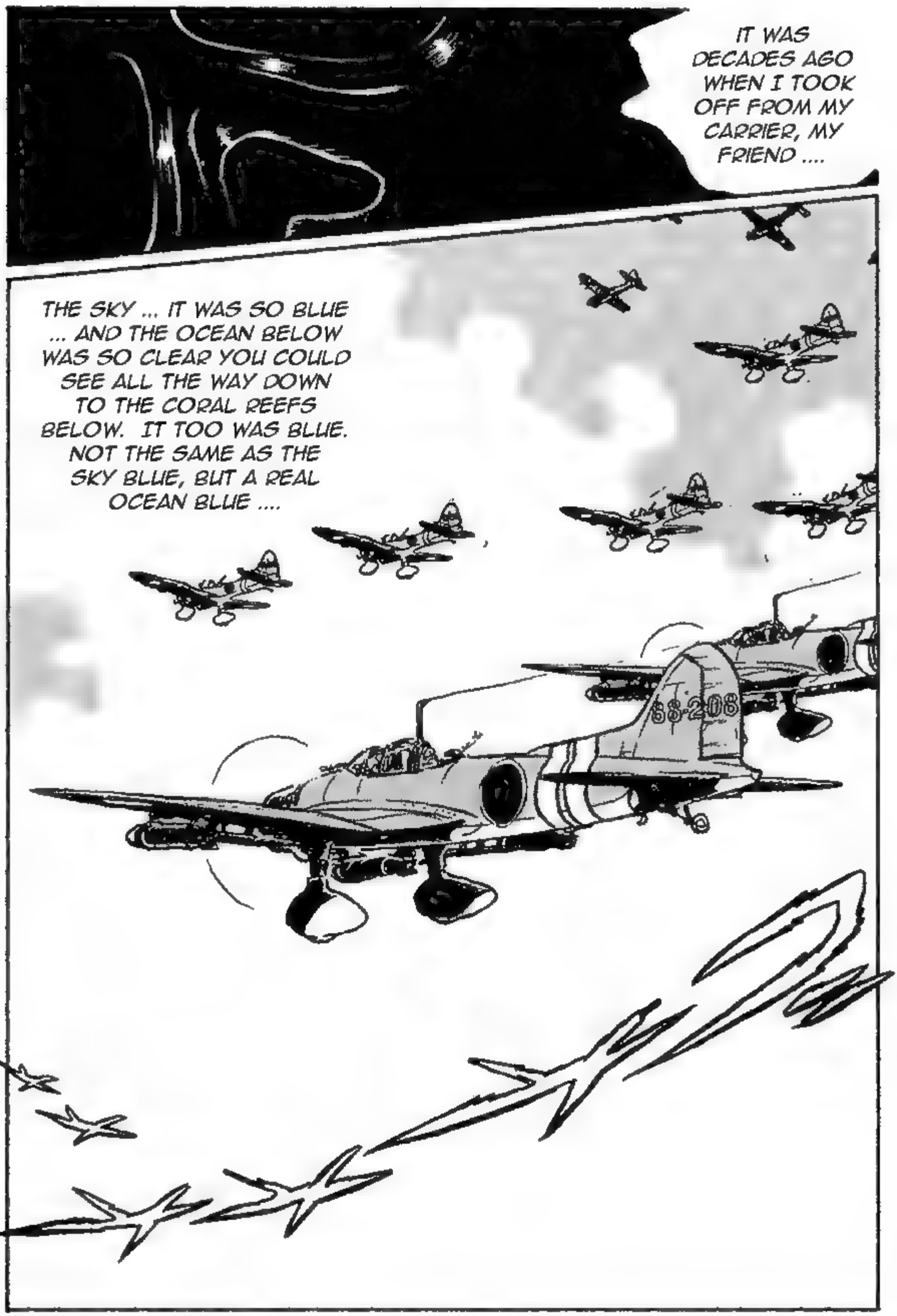
THE IMPERIAL NAVY AICHI D3A OR TYPE 99 WAS ITS PRIMARY CARRIER BASED DIVE BOMBER AT THE START OF THE WAR. IT IS FREQUENTLY AND FAVORABLY COMPARED WITH THE GERMAN JUNKERS JU-87 STUKA AS WELL AS BEING RATED AS ONE OF THE BEST ALL-AROUND DIVE BOMBERS AT THE START OF THE WAR. MANY CREDIT IT WITH SINKING MORE ALLIED SHIPS THAN ANY OTHER JAPANESE NAVAL AIRCRAFT.

WHAT YEAR ... DID YOU DIE ... DOWN HERE ...?

... THE AIR .... IT'S GOING FASTER THAN WE ANTICIPATED ... ANOTHER TANK ... MUST BE BUSTED ....

... SHIT ... CAN'T FOCUS ... CAN'T ...

WE FOUND YOU ... WILL OTHERS ... FIND ....


IT WAS DECADES AGO WHEN I TOOK OFF FROM MY CARRIER, MY FRIEND ....
THE SKY ... IT WAS SO BLUE ... AND THE OCEAN BELOW WAS SO CLEAR YOU COULD SEE ALL THE WAY DOWN TO THE CORAL REEFS BELOW. IT TOO WAS BLUE. NOT THE SAME AS THE SKY BLUE, BUT A REAL OCEAN BLUE ....
88-208

AH, MISTER FIGHTER! YOU'RE SO LUCKY TO BE SO FAST!

THE GUN FEELS A BIT STRANGE AND ROUGH TO MOVE.

YAMAMOTO! EVERYTHING CHECK OUT BACK THERE?

HOW MANY MISSIONS DOES THIS MAKE?

DO THEY REALLY EXPECT US TO FLY THROUGH ALL OF THAT ACK-ACK THE AMERICANS ARE GOING TO THROW AT US?

... IT'S THIS ONE!

IF ANYTHING IS GOING TO GO WRONG ON A MISSION ...

DOUBLE FOUR! THAT'S NOT GOOD!*

FORTY-FOUR, COUNTING THIS ONE, YAMAMOTO!

NOT TO MENTION FLYING IN SUCH AN OBSOLETE PLANE!

AND WE STILL DON'T HAVE ALL OF OUR BATTLE DAMAGED FIXED FROM THE LAST MISSION!

(*) IN JAPANESE CULTURE THE NUMBER FOUR (4) IS CONSIDERED UNLUCKY AS THEIR WORD FOR IT SOUNDS LIKE THEIR WORD FOR "DEATH." THUS "DOUBLE FOUR" OR "FOUR-FOUR" AS THEY WOULD SAY IT IS TWICE AS UNLUCKY ... OR TWICE AS OMINOUS.

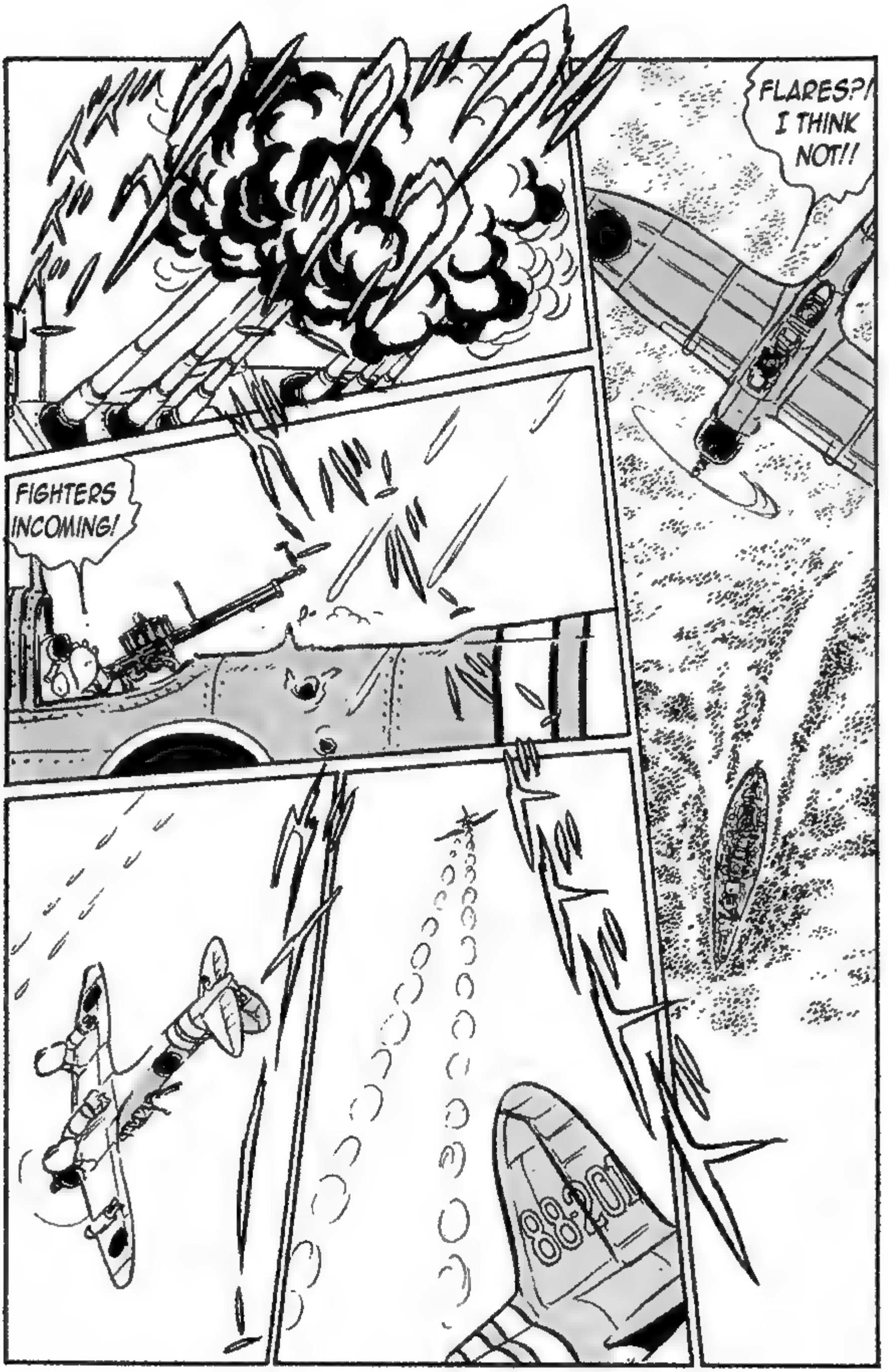
BY THE GODS, HERE HE GOES AGAIN. POOR YAMAMOTO!

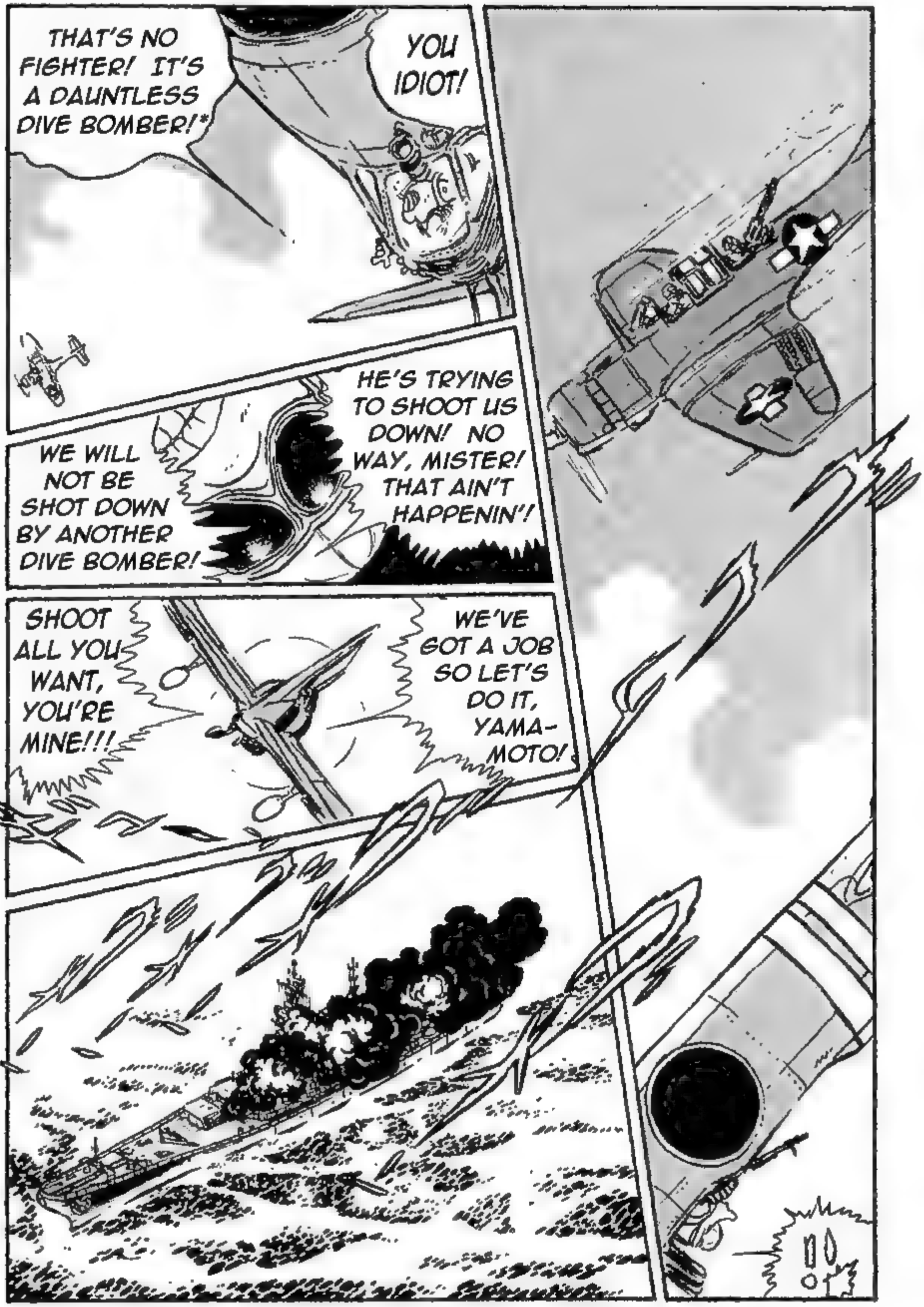
OH MISTER FIGHTER! DON'T GET CAUGHT IN A DOGFIGHT! PROTECT US ALL THE WAY!

SHAPE IT UP, YAMAMOTO! WE'RE THE INVINCIBLE JAPANESE NAVAL AIR FORCE!

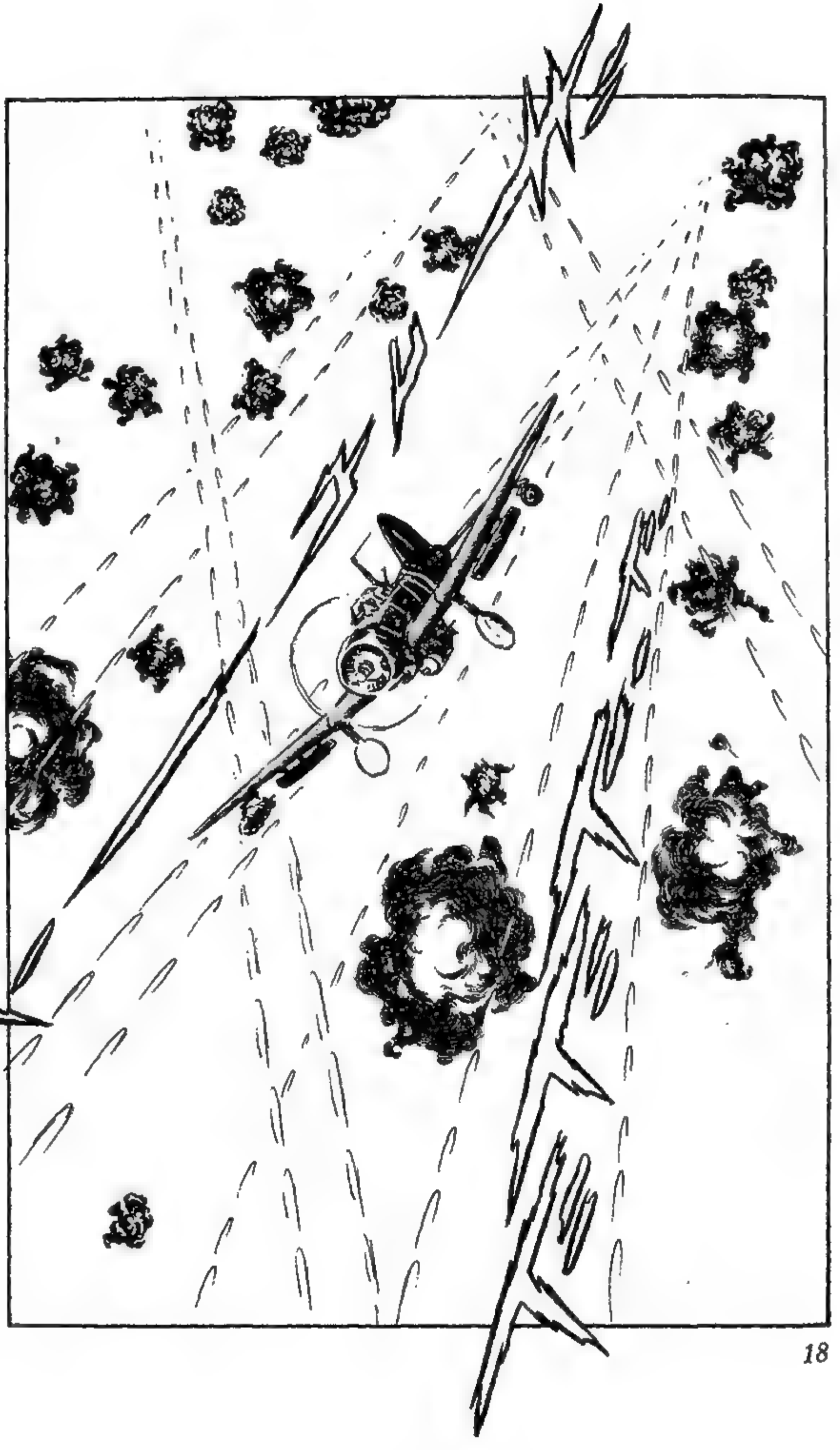
MONSOON LEADER, WE'RE SEEING FLARES FIRED!

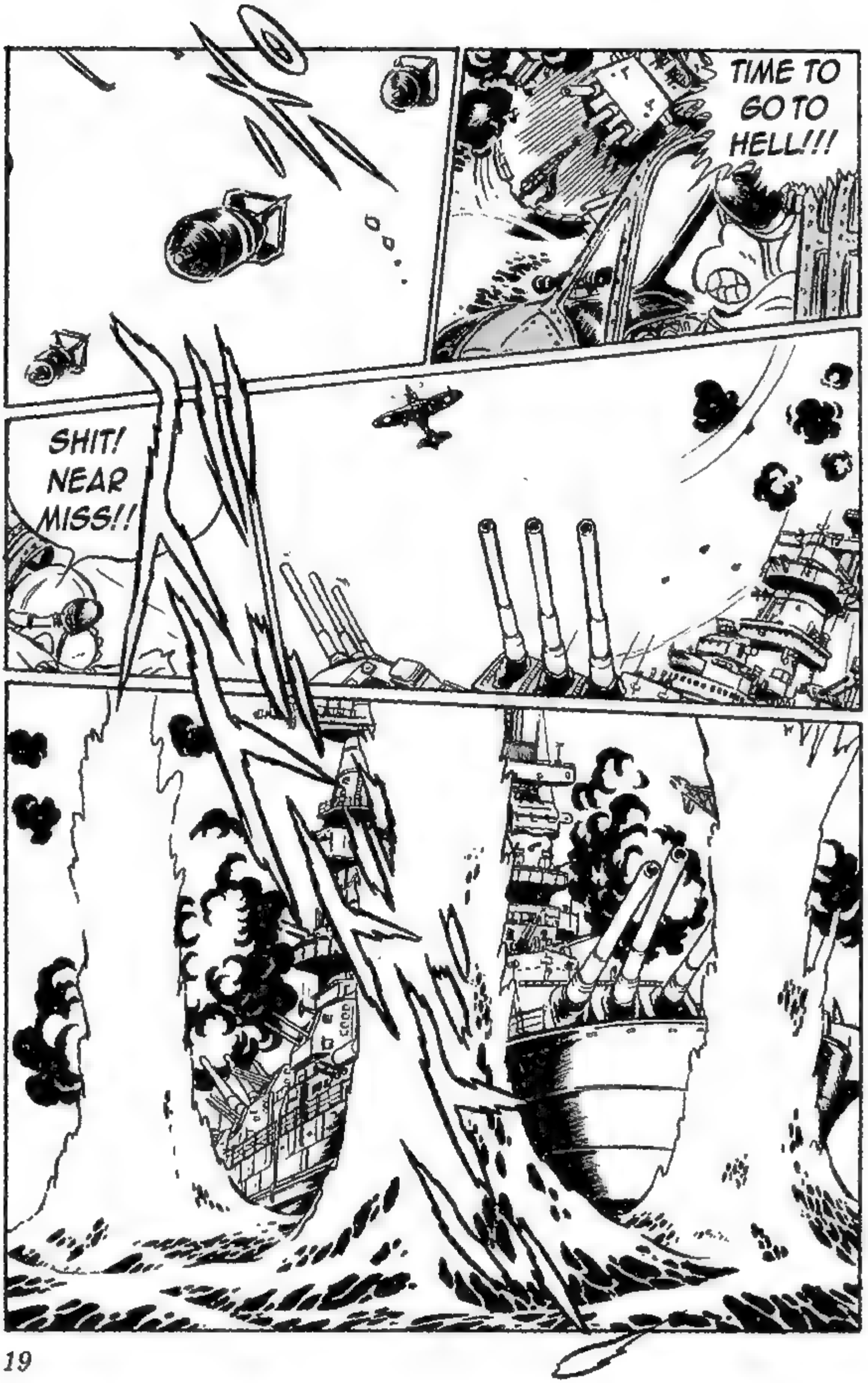
FLARES?! FROM WHERE?!


FLARES?! I THINK NOT!!
FIGHTERS INCOMING!


THAT'S NO FIGHTER! IT'S A DAUNTLESS DIVE BOMBER!*
YOU IDIOT!
HE'S TRYING TO SHOOT US DOWN! NO WAY, MISTER! THAT AIN'T HAPPENIN'!
WE WILL NOT BE SHOT DOWN BY ANOTHER DIVE BOMBER!
SHOOT ALL YOU WANT, YOU'RE MINE!!!
WE'VE GOT A JOB SO LET'S DO IT, YAMA-MOTO!

(*) THE AMERICAN DOUGLAS SBD DAUNTLESS, OR "SLOW BUT DEADLY" AS HER PILOTS NICKNAMED HER. THIS WAS THE PRIMARY DIVE BOMBER FOR THE U.S. NAVY AT THE START OF THE WAR AND IS BEST REMEMBERED TODAY FOR THE CRICITCAL ROLE PLAYED BY MULTIPLE SQUADRONS OF THEM AT THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY ON 4-7 JUNE 1942. IRONICALLY THE DAUNTLESS IS CREDITED WITH SINKING MORE SHIPPING THAN ANY OTHER ALLIED DIVE BOMBER IN THE PACIFIC DURING THE WAR.




TIME TO GO TO HELL!!!
SHIT! NEAR MISS!!

LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE. WE'RE LIGHTER NOW.

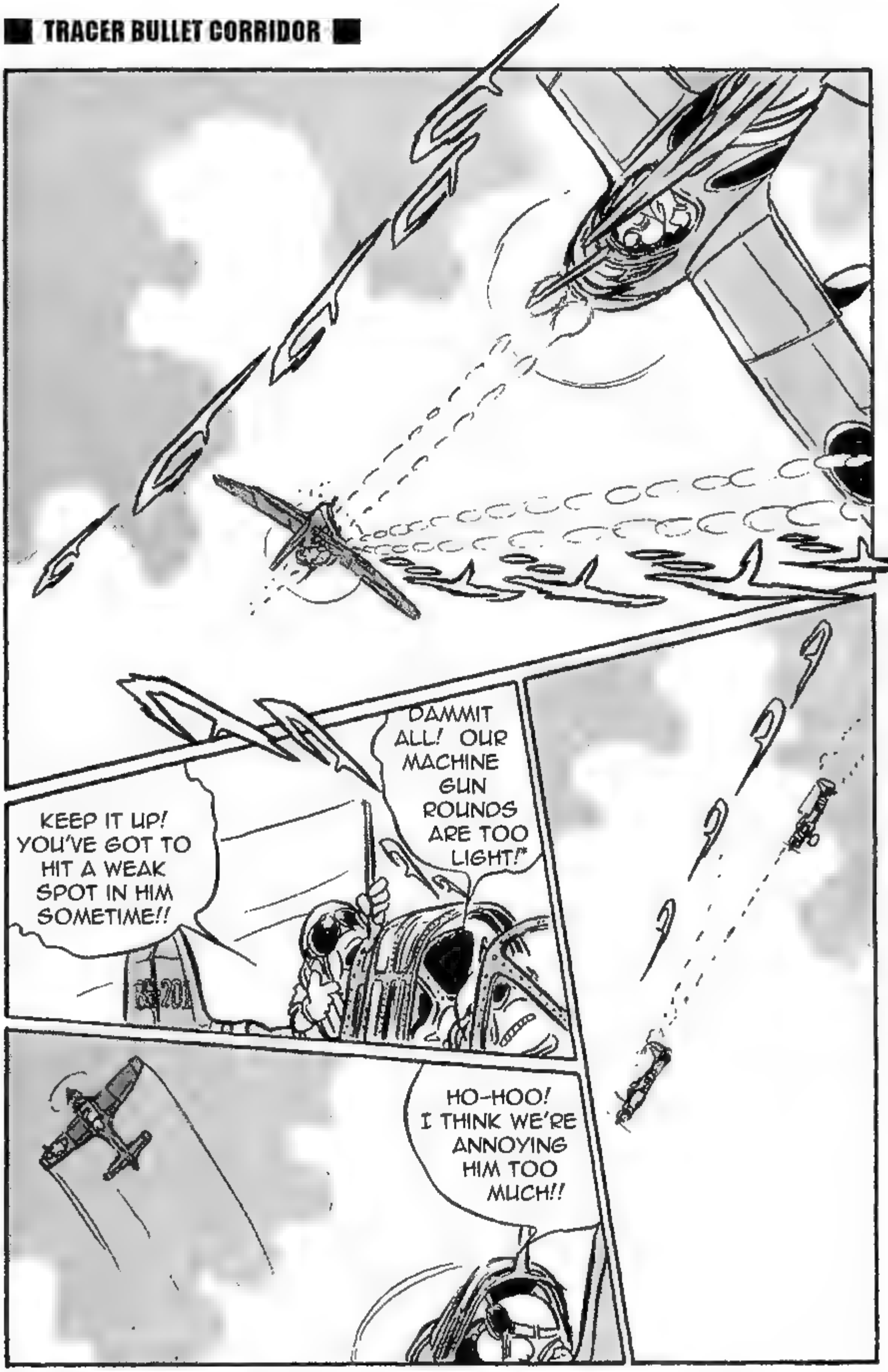
FUCK! FUCK- FUCK- FUCK!!

NOW THAT OUR BOMBS ARE GONE, WE'RE LIGHT AS A FIGHTER!!

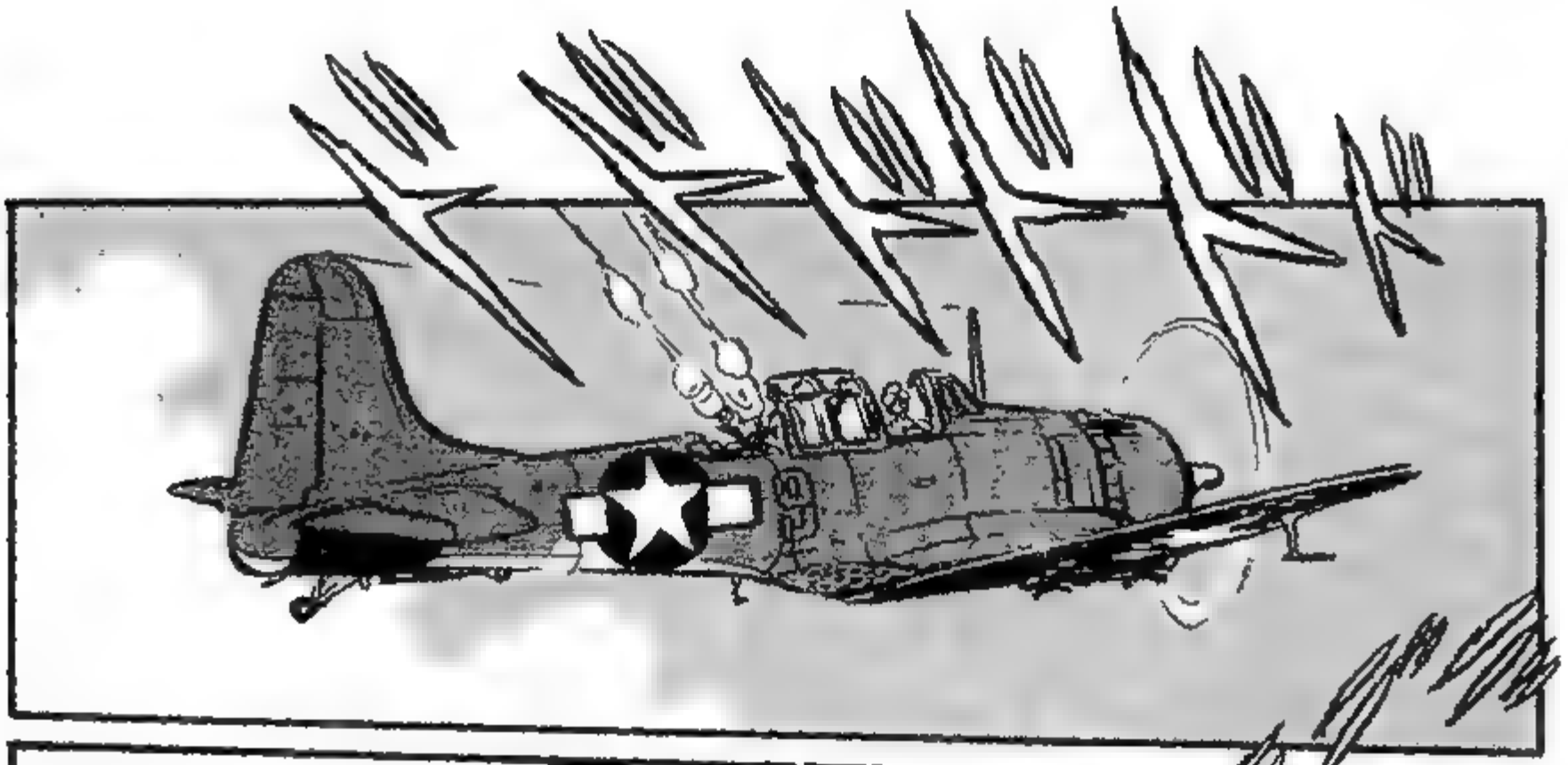
YOU WERE RIGHT EARLIER!

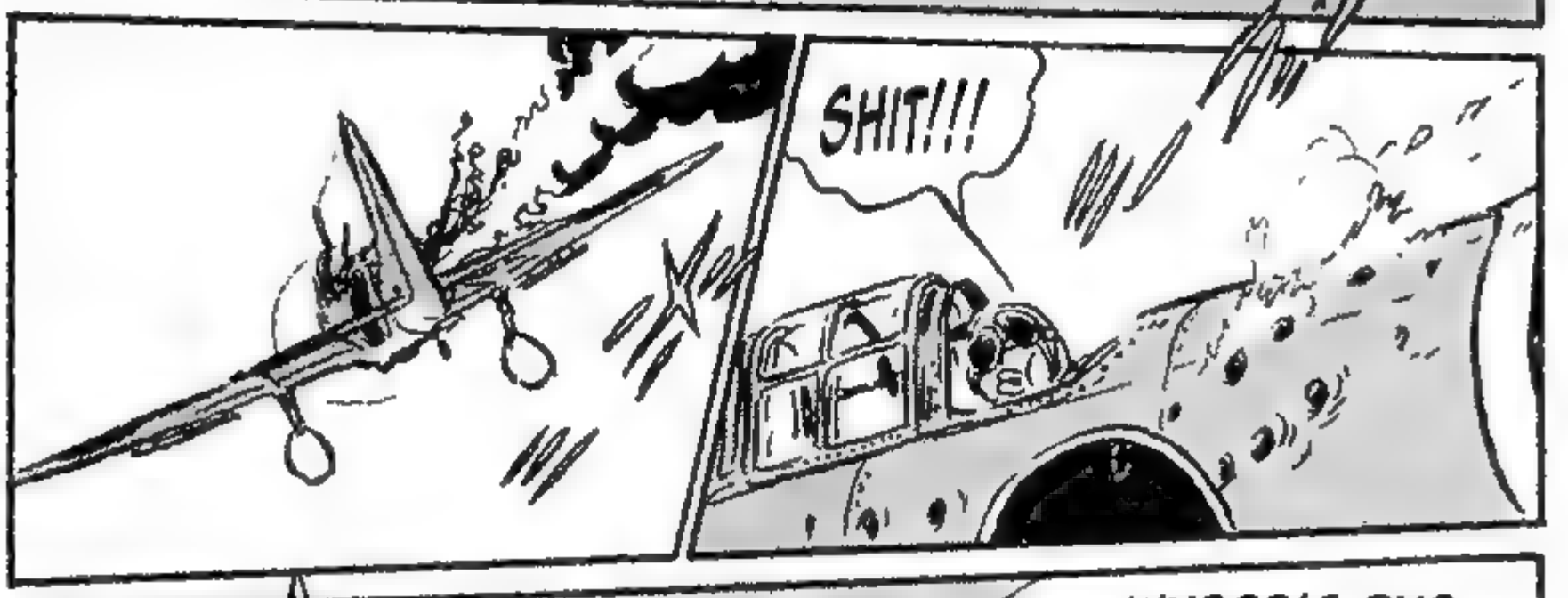
GUESS WHO'S BACK FOR MORE?!

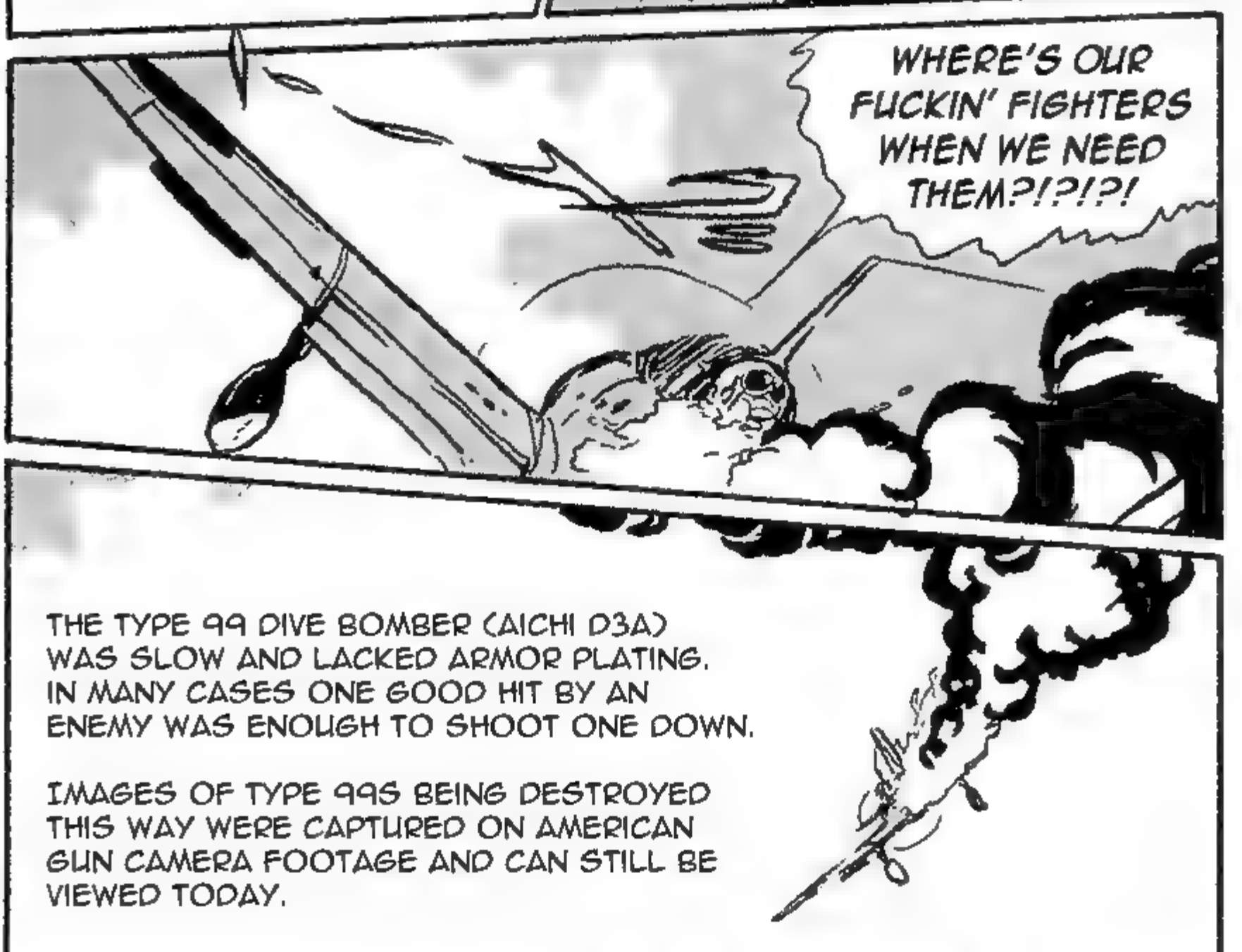
TRACER BULLET CORRIDOR


DAMMIT ALL! OUR MACHINE GUN ROUNDS ARE TOO LIGHT!*
KEEP IT UP! YOU'VE GOT TO HIT A WEAK SPOT IN HIM SOMETIME!!
HO-HOO! I THINK WE'RE ANNOYING HIM TOO MUCH!!

21 (*) THE "VAL" WAS ARMED WITH TWIN 7.7MM NOSE MACHINE GUNS AND A 7.7MM MACHINE GUN FOR THE REAR GUNNER. WHICH IN MOST CASES WERE FAR TOO WEAK TO SIGNIFICANTLY DAMAGE AMERICAN AIRCRAFT. IN COMPARISON THE SBD DAUNTLESS HAD TWO NOSE-MOUNTED BROWNING 50-CALS (12.7MM) AND A BROWNING 50-CAL DUAL FOR THE REAR GUNNER -- AS WELL AS AN ARMORED COCKPIT AND SELF-SEALING FUEL TANKS, WHICH THE "VAL" LACKED.







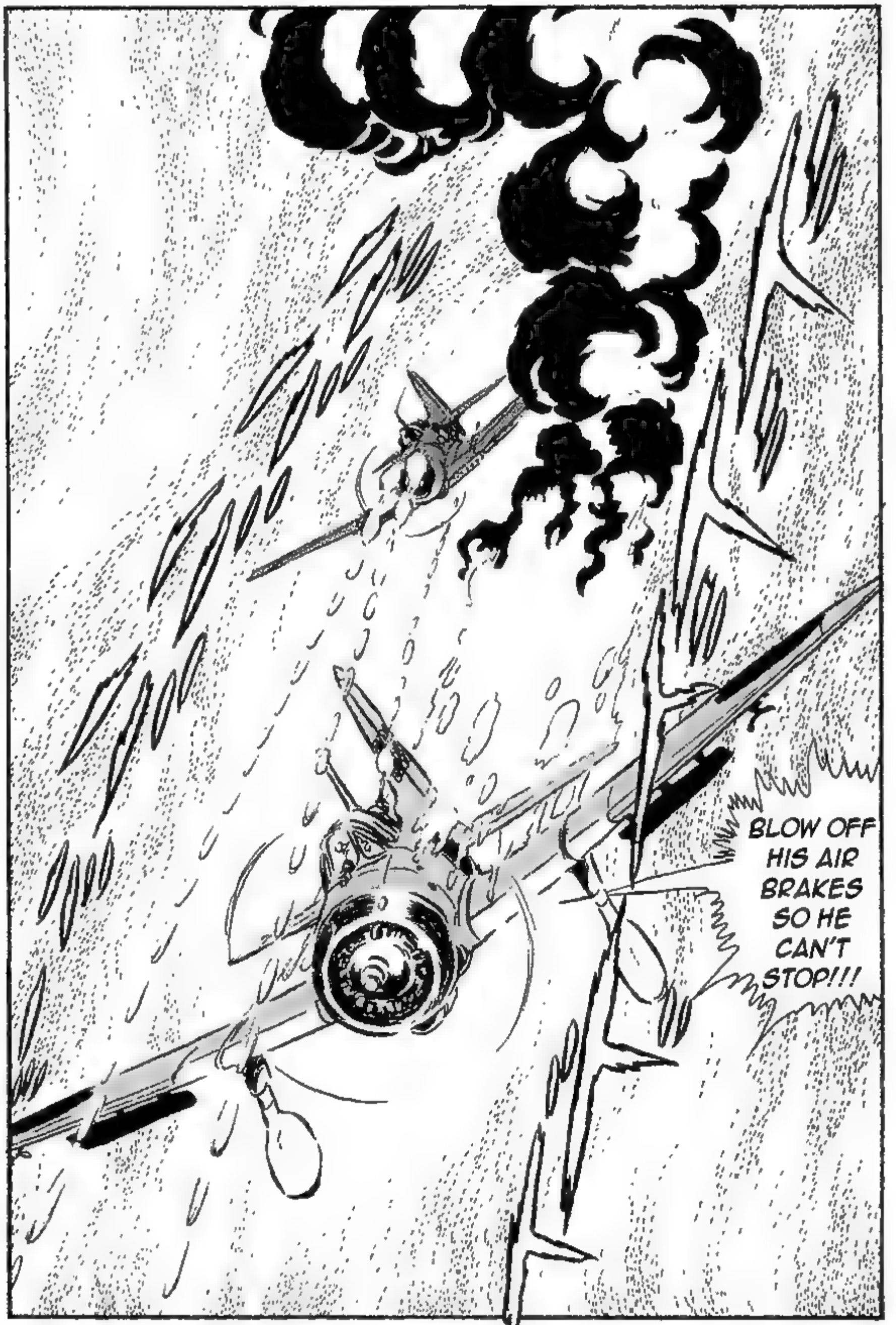
THE TYPE 99 DIVE BOMBER (AICHI D3A) WAS SLOW AND LACKED ARMOR PLATING. IN MANY CASES ONE GOOD HIT BY AN ENEMY WAS ENOUGH TO SHOOT ONE DOWN.

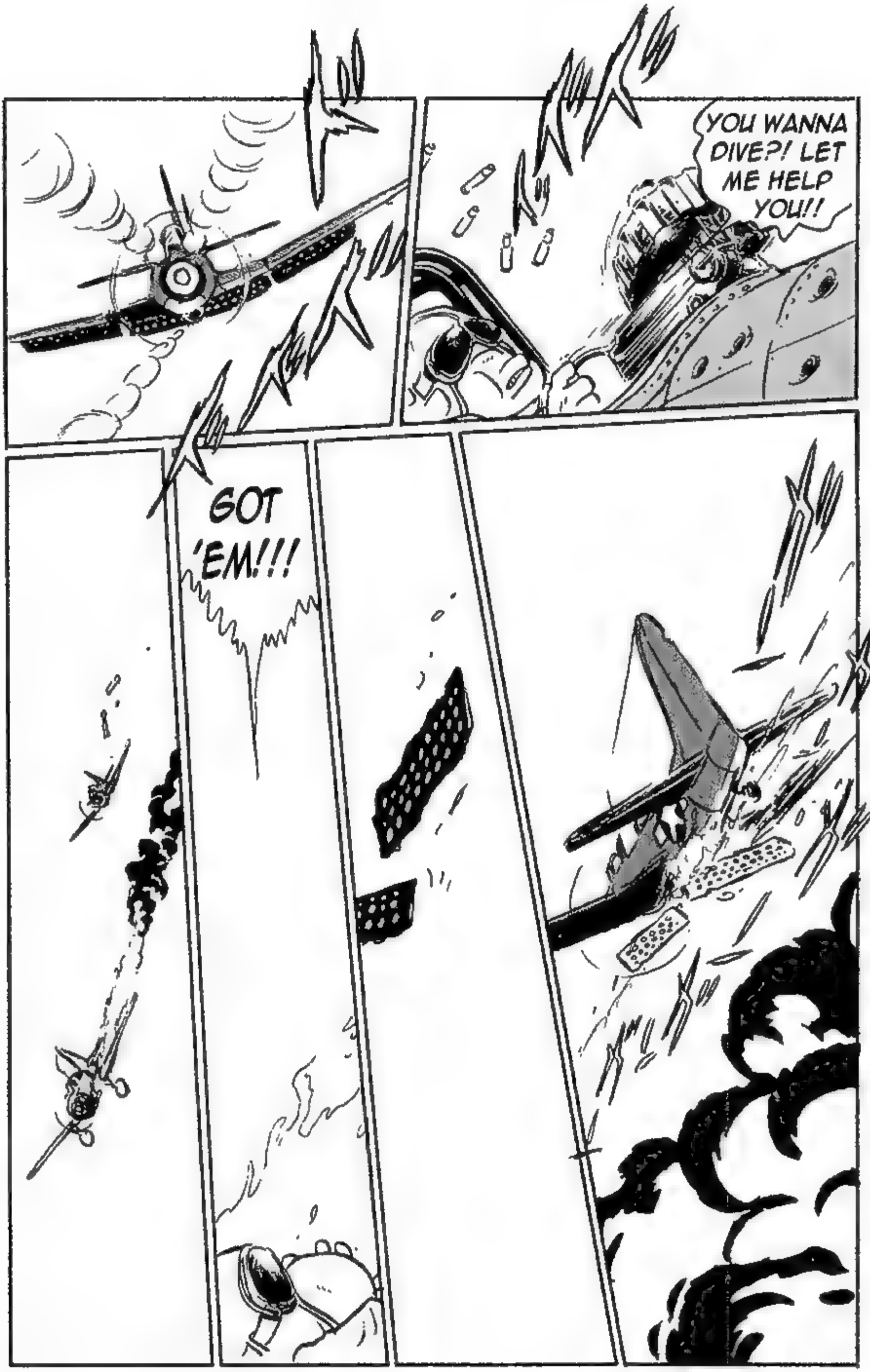
IMAGES OF TYPE 99S BEING DESTROYED THIS WAY WERE CAPTURED ON AMERICAN GUN CAMERA FOOTAGE AND CAN STILL BE VIEWED TODAY.

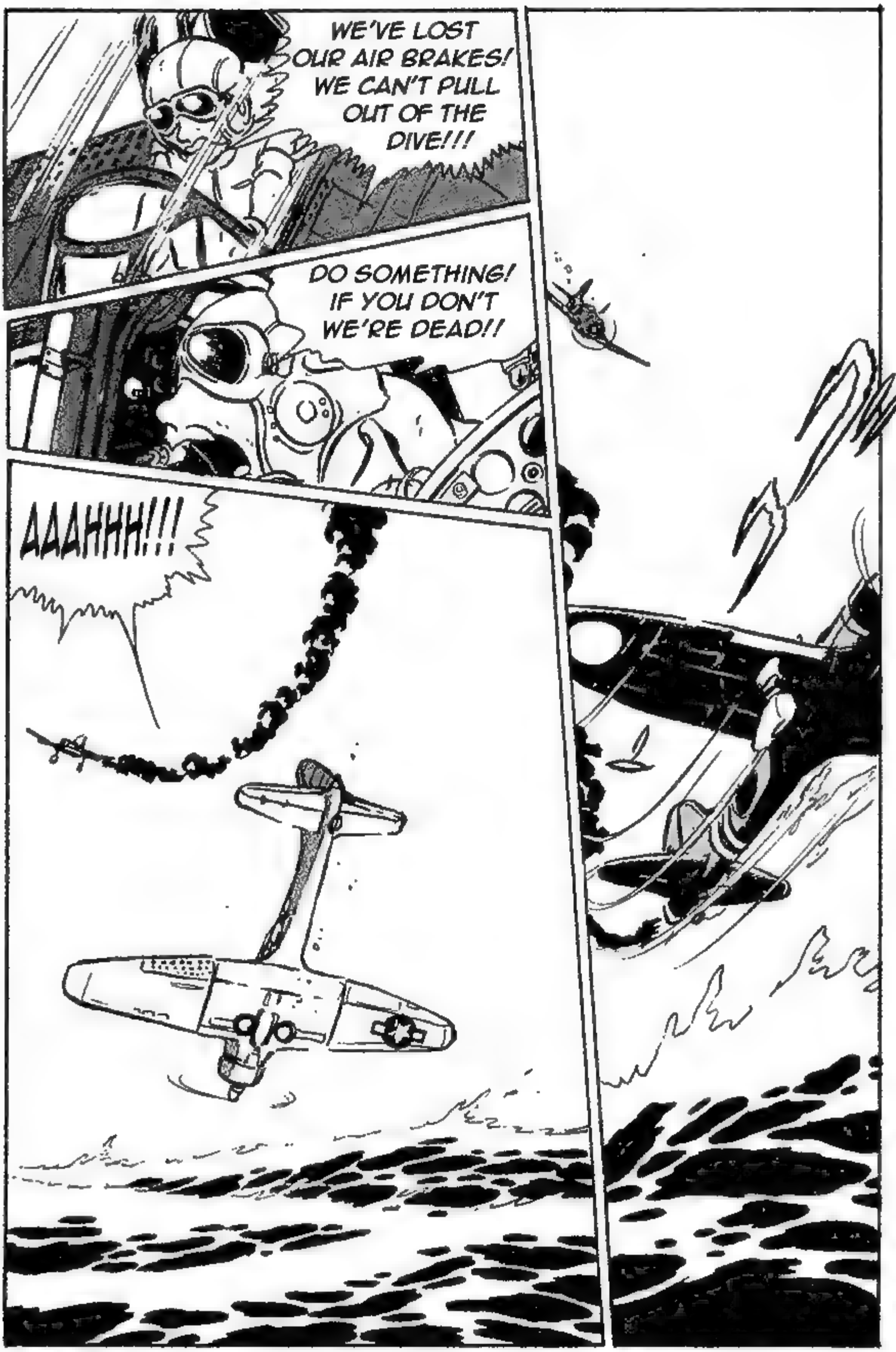
LATER JAPANESE CARRIER-BASED DIVE BOMBERS SUCH AS THE AICHI B7A RYUSEI, AND FIGHTERS SUCH AS THE IMPERIAL ARMY HAYATE AND THE IMPERIAL NAVY'S SHIDEN-KAI HAD MANY OF THE SAME PROTECTIVE FEATURES AS AMERICAN PLANES. THERE IS WARTIME AMERICAN GUN CAMERA FOOTAGE OF THESE SUFFERING SEVERE DAMAGE YET CONTINUING TO FLY ....

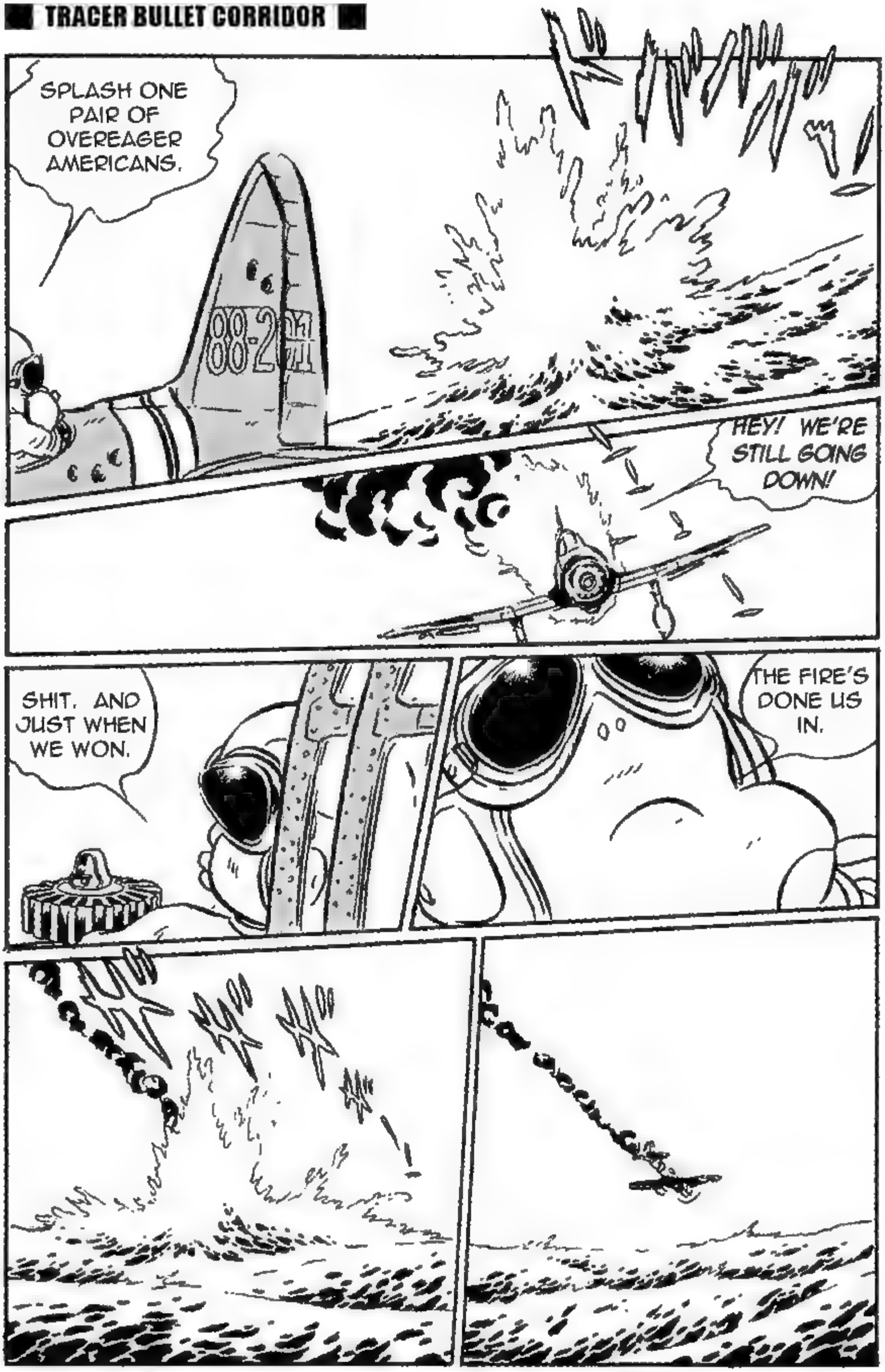
I'M DIVING TO PUT OUT THE FIRE! HANG ON!!

I'D SHOOT IF I COULD SEE! DAMN SMOKE!!


BLOW OFF HIS AIR BRAKES SO HE CAN'T STOP!!!


YOU WANNA DIVE?! LET ME HELP YOU!!
GOT 'EM!!!


WE'VE LOST OUR AIR BRAKES! WE CAN'T PULL OUT OF THE DIVE!!!
DO SOMETHING! IF YOU DON'T WE'RE DEAD!!
AAAHHH!!!


SPLASH ONE PAIR OF OVEREAGER AMERICANS.
HEY! WE'RE STILL GOING DOWN!
SHIT. AND JUST WHEN WE WON.
THE FIRE'S DONE US IN.

I'VE BEEN DOWN HERE EVER SINCE. I BELONG HERE NOW ... BUT YOU DON'T.

THAT'S MY STORY.

ONE LAST DEED TO DO BEFORE MY FINAL DIVE ....

MY LAST LIVING MEMORY WAS OF BEING SURROUNDED BY THAT INCREDIBLY BLUE SEA I HAD SEEN ABOVE.

WE'RE STARTING TO RISE! YIPEEE!!!

THAT FALLING PLANE MUST HAVE KNOCKED US FREE OF THE ROCKS!

THERE IT GOES.

I DON'T KNOW ....

DO ... DO YOU THINK THAT GUY OVER THERE ... DID HE *HELP* US?

NO. HE'S ON HIS FINAL DIVE .... GOODBYE, FRIEND. THANK YOU.

ALL I KNOW IS WE'RE RISING AND HE'S NOT.

AND SO THE TWO OF THEM WATCHED FROM THEIR SLOWLY RISING MINISUB AS THAT OLD TYPE 99 MADE ITS FINAL DIVE INTO THE DEEP BLUE DEPTHS OF MANILA BAY.
WAS IT JUST CHANCE, OR DID ITS LONG-DEAD PILOT REALLY HELP THEM OUT OF THEIR PLIGHT?
YOU TELL ME.
ENDE

<Published in Big Comic Original, May 5, 1978 issue>

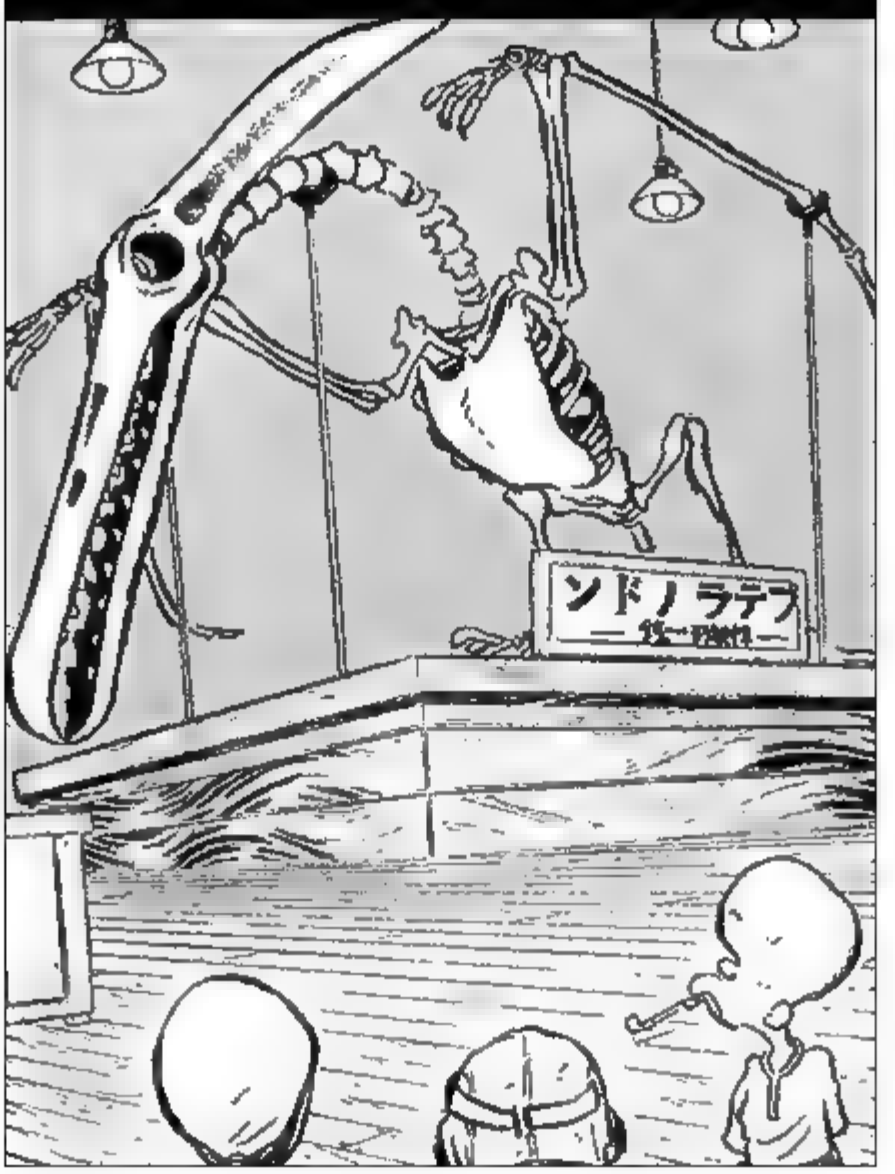
MANDELISMS

There's not a lot to say about this one It's a typical military ghost story but told only as Matsumoto can tell them -- which in turn makes it better than many My only comment is on the title "Tracer Bullet Corridor " This refers to the tunnel-like effect of lots of tracer fire going around someone in a firefight Those of you who have been in the service and have seen combat know what I'm talking about The rest of you will have to look at movies or videos of real combat footage to see the effect, and it's best seen from the first person perspective I believe this ties in with the dogfight between the two dive bombers in the story, with the Dauntless flying down a tracer bullet corridor in its effort to shoot down the Val and in turn the Val trying to escape the one caused by the fire from the Dauntless All other discussion on other possible topics I leave to the rest of you Talk among yourselves

Oh! I almost forgot! There's something else to note in this story if you're a big Leijiverse trivia fan This is the first story in *The Cockpit* series in which Matsumoto clearly depicts an *Iowa* class battleship of the U S Navy We got to see the dark silhouette of what is identified by the Japanese as an American battleship back in Volume 8's "Electric Boat No 13," but it's never drawn distinctly and the clearest image we have of it looks like a mix of details from the *Iowa* and far older *Colorado* classes For that matter it could be one of the older prewar U S Navy heavy cruiser classes given their somewhat similar profiles to what Matsumoto draws There's no mistake about it in this story, although it's very easy to confuse it with the earlier *North Carolina* class given the way Matsumoto draws it How do I know for sure it's an *Iowa* class? Because he includes a late Cold War detail on the bow in one of his images that only belongs to the postwar *Iowa* You don't believe me? Flip to page 17 of the story and look closely at the bow of the battleship See that strange thingy on the bow? Compare that with pictures of the Cold War era *Iowa* modernization and you'll see that's a discone cage antenna but without the "cage " As one of my friends from long ago might have said, hmmmmm hmmmmmhh!!! Don't worry, fellow Leijiverse fans Matsumoto would return to the *Iowas* in his later *Hard Metal* and *Case Hard* manga series, both follow-ons to *The Cockpit*, and in the later ones he'd draw them right for both the World War II and Cold War eras

TALES FROM THE COCKPIT

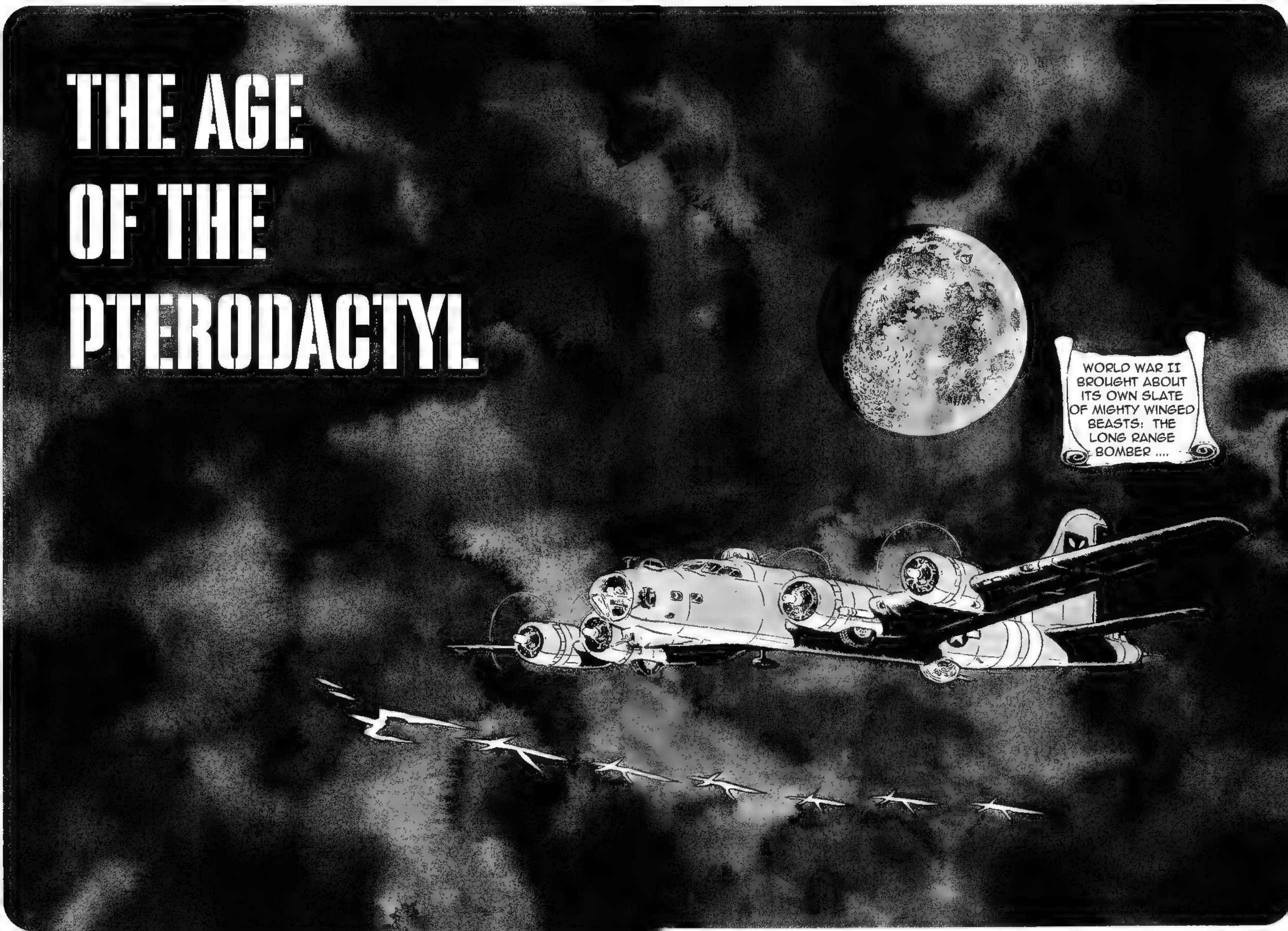
THE AGE OF THE PTERODACTYL

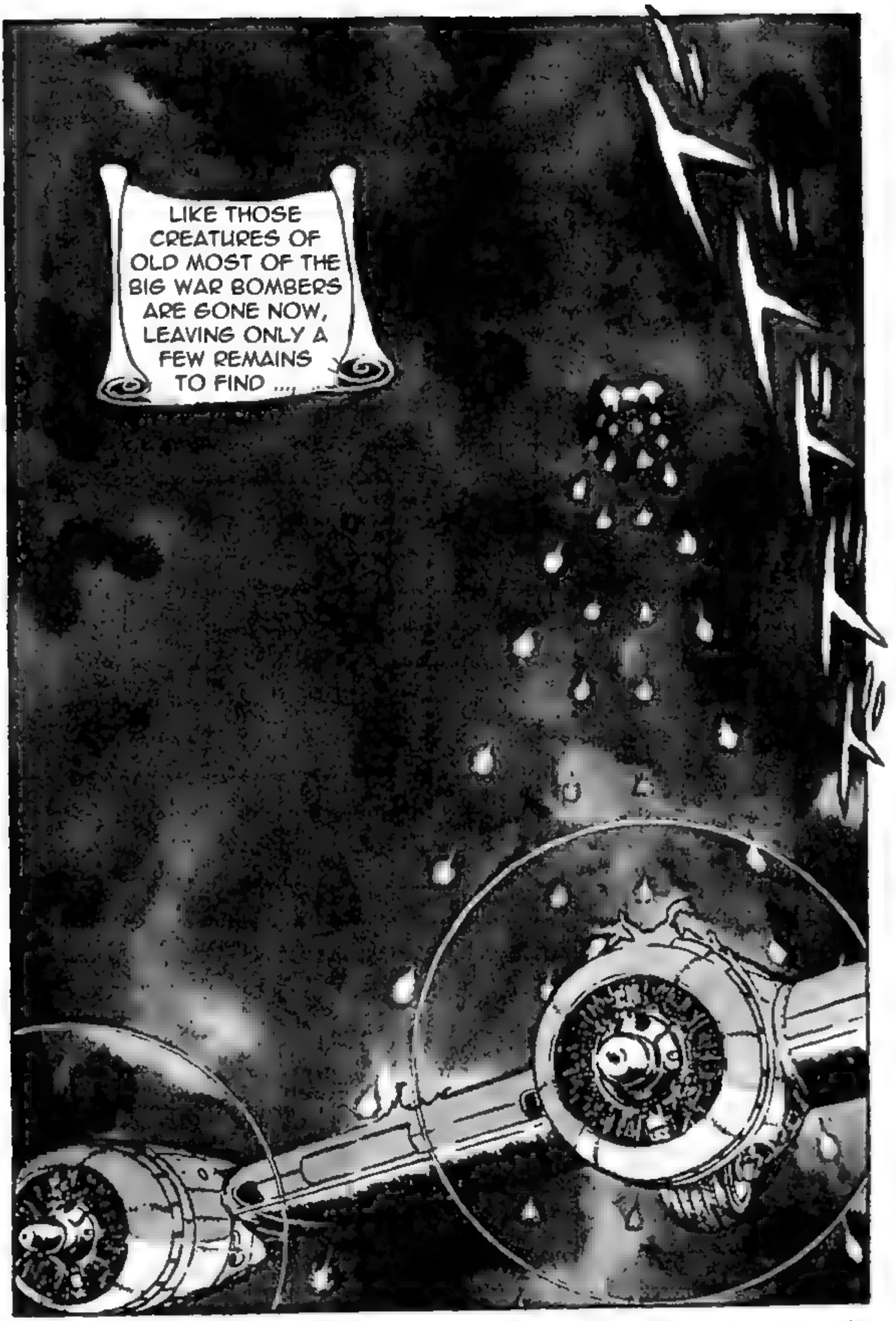


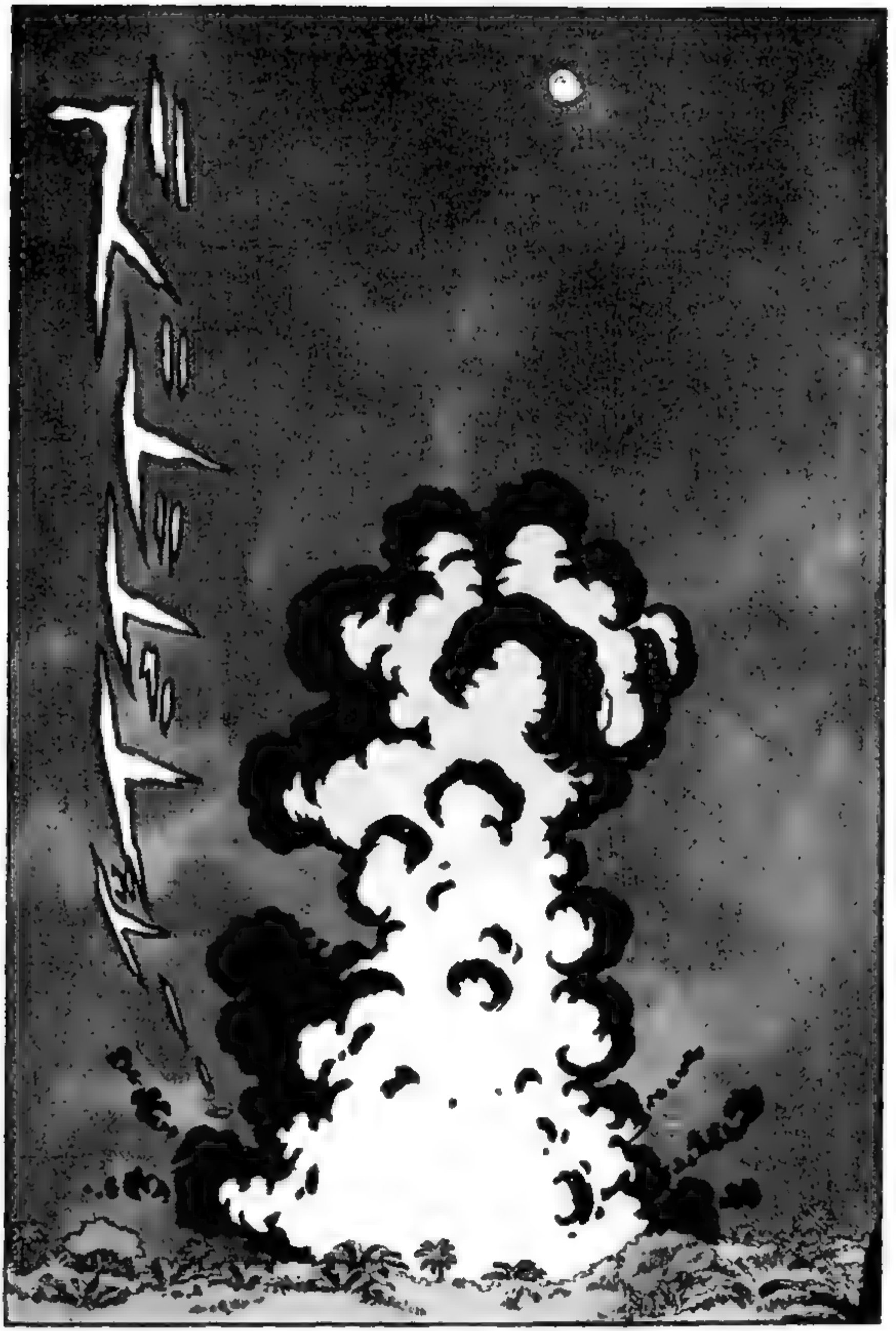
THE AGE OF THE PTERODACTYL

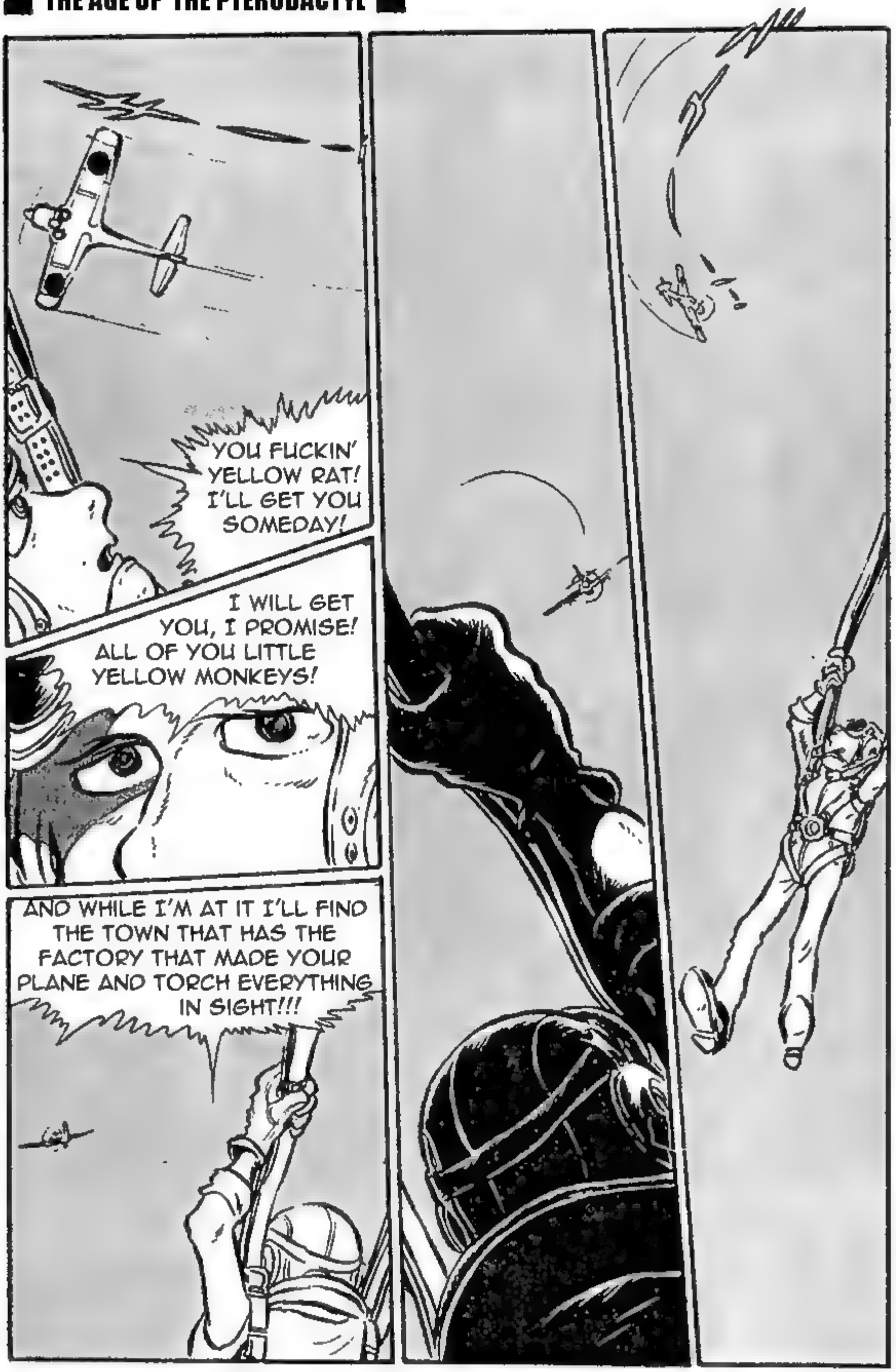
PTERODACTYLS WERE THE MOST POWERFUL WINGED CREATURES OF THEIR TIME. THEY CAME IN ALL SIZES, BUT IT'S THE BIG ONES THAT MOST PEOPLE THESE DAYS THINK OF

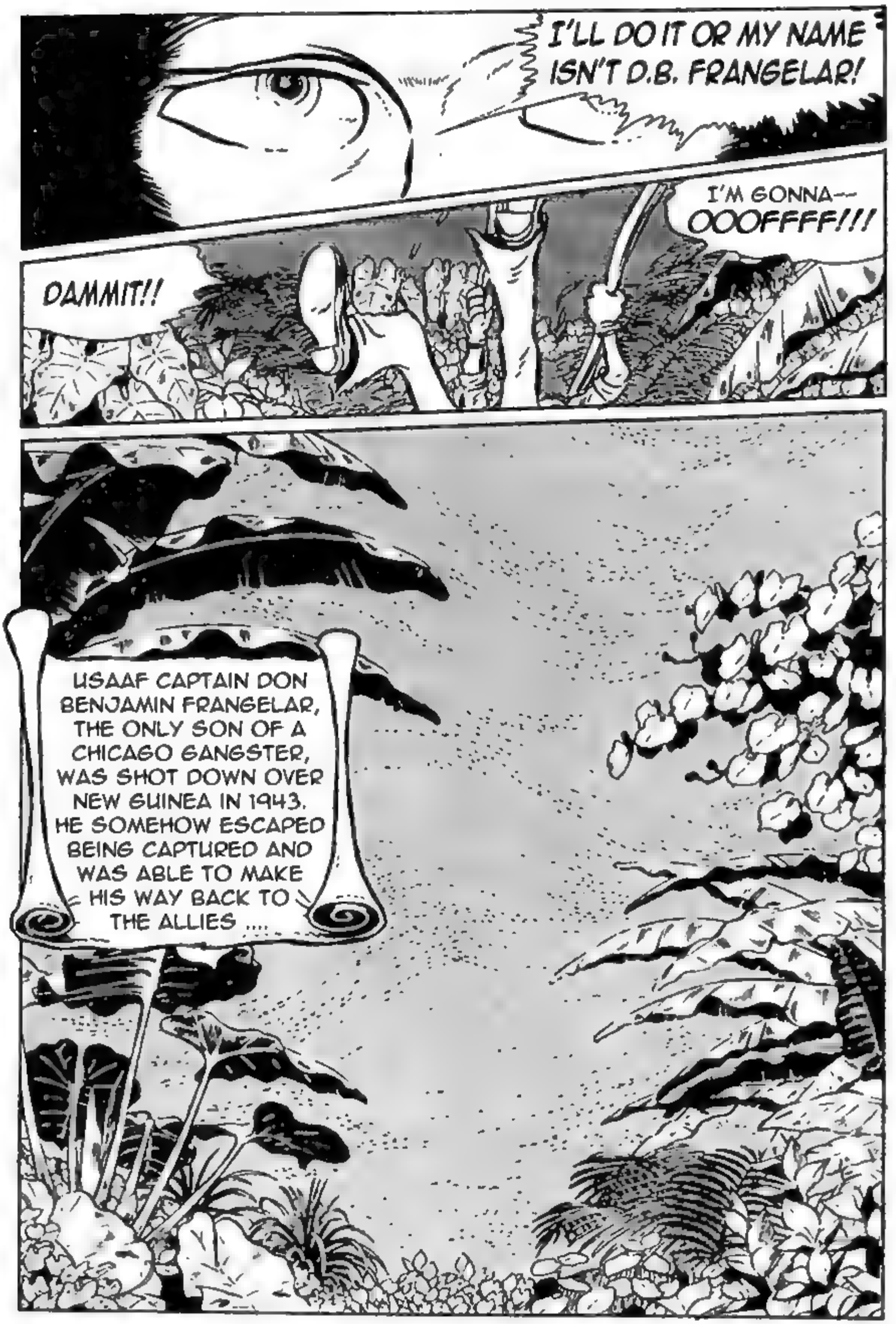
THE AGE OF THE PTERODACTYL

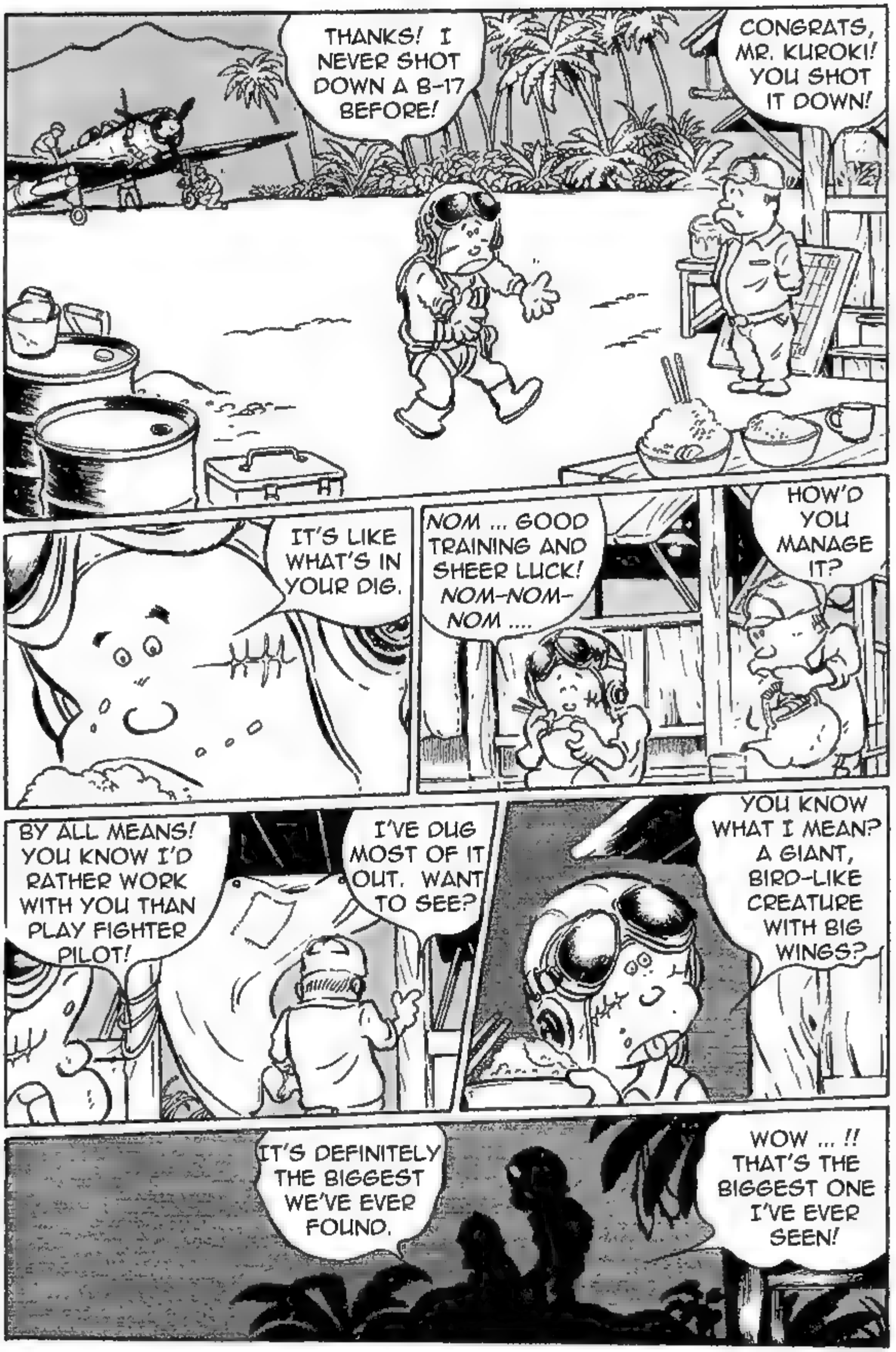


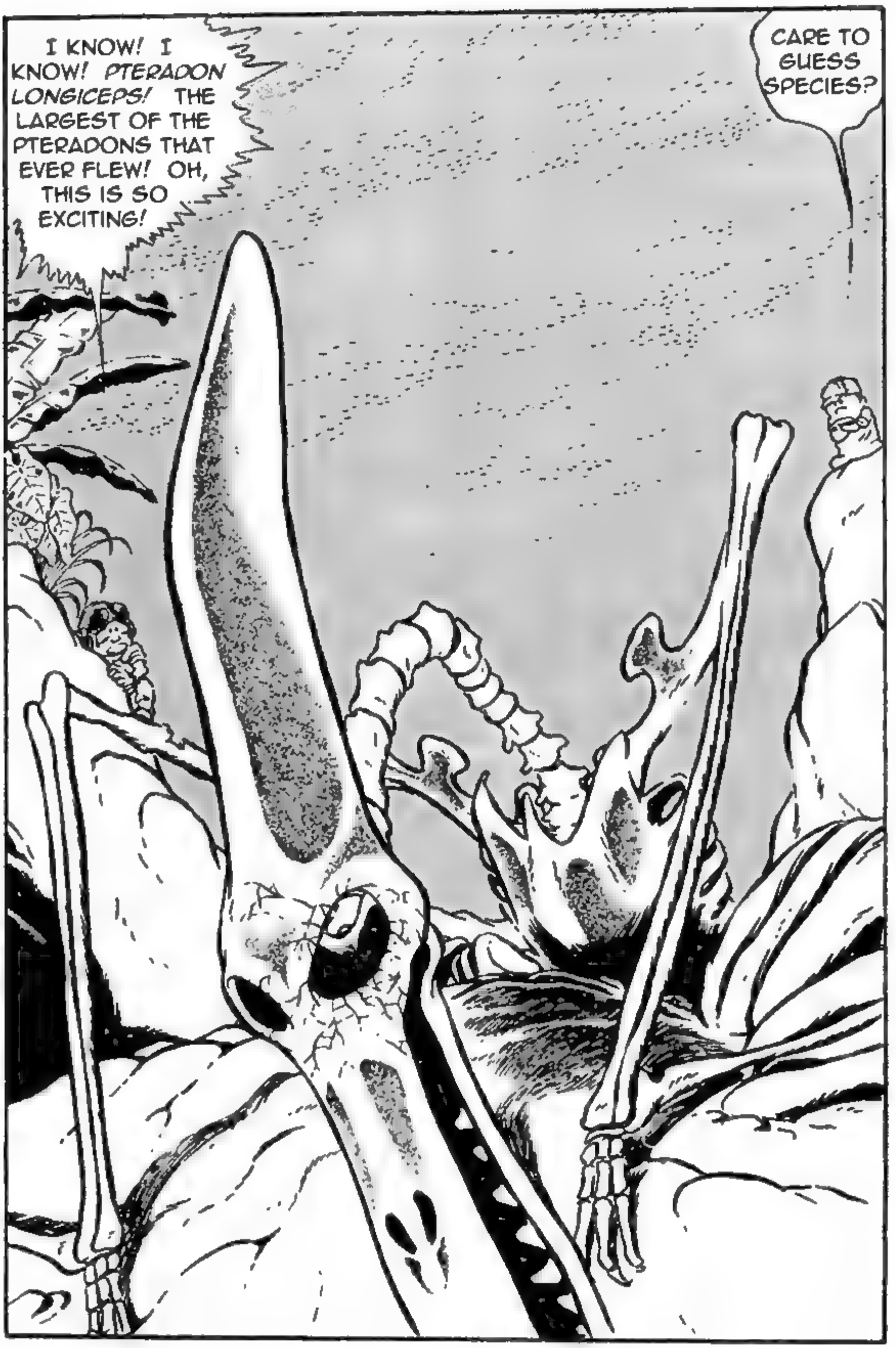

LIKE THOSE CREATURES OF OLD MOST OF THE BIG WAR BOMBERS ARE GONE NOW, LEAVING ONLY A FEW REMAINS TO FIND ...,




YOU FUCKIN' YELLOW RAT! I'LL GET YOU SOMEDAY!
I WILL GET YOU, I PROMISE! ALL OF YOU LITTLE YELLOW MONKEYS!
AND WHILE I'M AT IT I'LL FIND THE TOWN THAT HAS THE FACTORY THAT MADE YOUR PLANE AND TORCH EVERYTHING IN SIGHT!!!


I'LL DO IT OR MY NAME ISN'T D.B. FRANGELAR!
I'M GONNA— OOOFFFF!!!
DAMMIT!!
USAAF CAPTAIN DON BENJAMIN FRANGELAR, THE ONLY SON OF A CHICAGO GANGSTER, WAS SHOT DOWN OVER NEW GUINEA IN 1943. HE SOMEHOW ESCAPED BEING CAPTURED AND WAS ABLE TO MAKE HIS WAY BACK TO THE ALLIES ....


THANKS! I NEVER SHOT DOWN A B-17 BEFORE!
CONGRATS, MR. KUROKI! YOU SHOT IT DOWN!
IT'S LIKE WHAT'S IN YOUR DIG.
NOM ... GOOD TRAINING AND SHEER LUCK! NOM-NOM-NOM ....
HOW'D YOU MANAGE IT?
BY ALL MEANS! YOU KNOW I'D RATHER WORK WITH YOU THAN PLAY FIGHTER PILOT!
I'VE DUG MOST OF IT OUT. WANT TO SEE?
YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN? A GIANT, BIRD-LIKE CREATURE WITH BIG WINGS?
IT'S DEFINITELY THE BIGGEST WE'VE EVER FOUND.
WOW ... !! THAT'S THE BIGGEST ONE I'VE EVER SEEN!


I KNOW! I KNOW! *PTERADON LONGICEPS!* THE LARGEST OF THE PTERADONS THAT EVER FLEW! OH, THIS IS SO EXCITING!
CARE TO GUESS SPECIES?

BINGO! LATE CRETACEOUS PERIOD. YOU DIDN'T FORGET YOUR STUDIES!

YOU KNOW, IT'S KIND OF IRONIC, DOCTOR. MOST PTERADON AND PTERODACTYL FOSSILS ARE FOUND IN NORTH AMERICA, AND THAT'S WHERE THAT B-17 WAS MADE.

OH, AND THE ARMY'S GOING TO LET YOU FLY ESCORT FOR IT.

REALLY?! OH, THIS IS TOO MUCH! THANK YOU, DOCTOR!

WE'RE ALREADY IN TOUCH WITH UENO PARK.* THEY'RE EAGER TO GET IT.

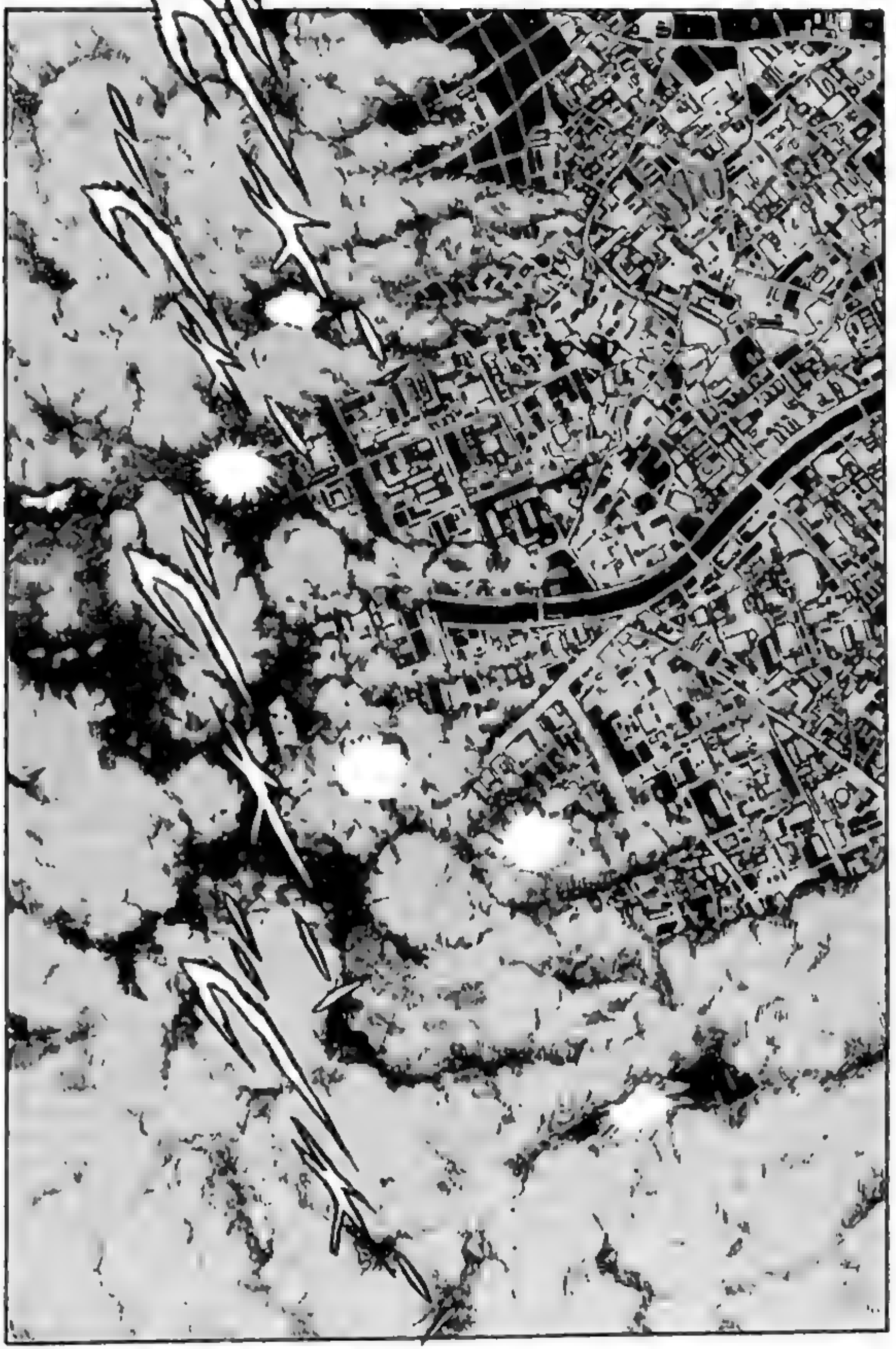
COOL! IT'LL BE SO NICE TO HAVE IT THERE WHERE EVERYONE CAN SEE IT!!

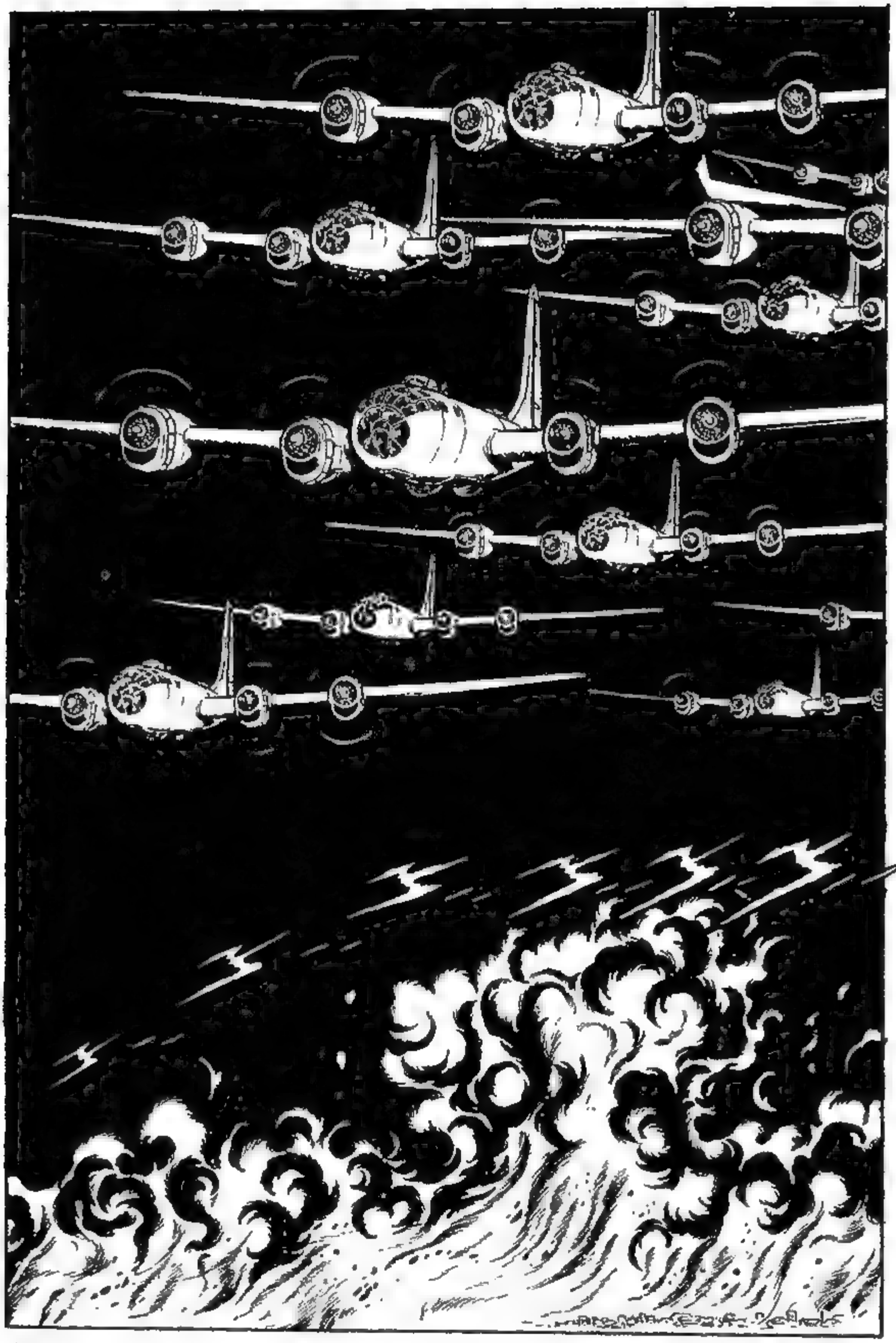
POOR FELLA. LOOKS LIKE HE FLEW INTO SOMETHING AND CRACKED HIS SKULL. OH, I HOPE YOU AND YOUR TEAM CAN GET THIS EXCAVATED AND BACK TO JAPAN BEFORE WE GET BOMBED!

WE'LL DO OUR BEST.

(*) *UENO PARK* - LOCATION OF THE TOKYO NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURE AND SCIENCE.

EARLY SPRING 1945
(TWO YEARS LATER ...)



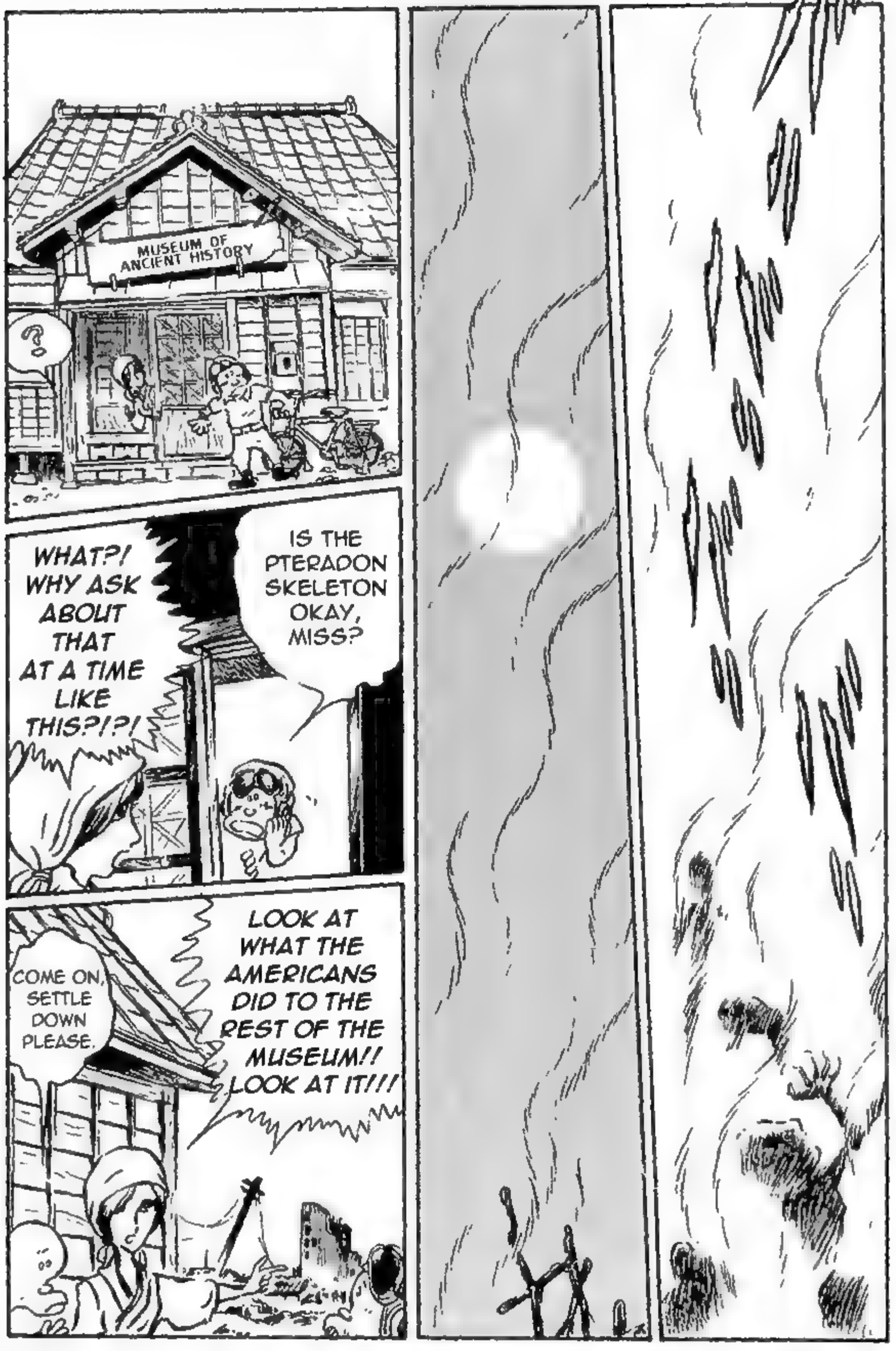


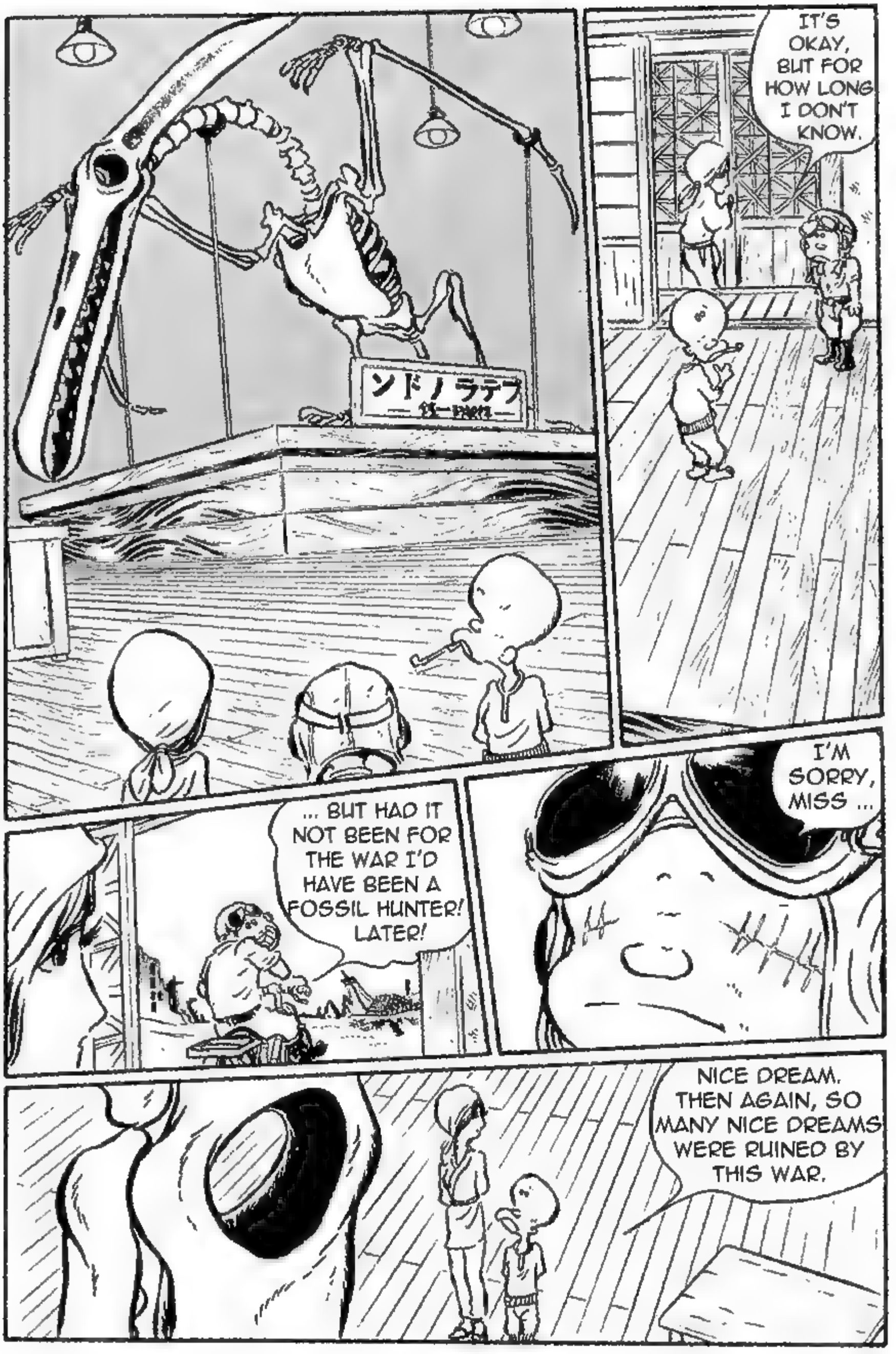
GOD BUT THIS IS SO EASY! NOT LIKE EARLIER IN THE WAR!! THEY CAN BARELY TOUCH US!!!

THEIR AA BATTERIES CAN'T FIRE HIGH ENOUGH AND WHAT HIGH ALTITUDE FIGHTERS THEY HAVE DON'T DO VERY WELL GIVEN HOW HIGH WE FLY!

D.B.FRANGELAR

NOW LET'S CARPET BOMB EVERY LAST ONE OF THE LITTLE YELLOW MUTHERFUCKERS BACK TO THE STONE AGE!


MUSEUM OF ANCIENT HISTORY
?
WHAT?! WHY ASK ABOUT THAT AT A TIME LIKE THIS?!?!
IS THE PTERADON SKELETON OKAY, MISS?
COME ON, SETTLE DOWN PLEASE.
LOOK AT WHAT THE AMERICANS DID TO THE REST OF THE MUSEUM!! LOOK AT IT!!!


IT'S OKAY, BUT FOR HOW LONG I DON'T KNOW.
I'M SORRY, MISS ...
... BUT HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE WAR I'D HAVE BEEN A FOSSIL HUNTER! LATER!
NICE DREAM. THEN AGAIN, SO MANY NICE DREAMS WERE RUINED BY THIS WAR.

WE CAN'T SAVE IT, YOU KNOW. IF AN AMERICAN BOMB EVER HITS THIS PLACE THEN THIS MAGNIFICENT SPECIMEN WILL BE DESTROYED.
IF I EVER SEE AN AMERICAN AND I HAVE THE MEANS THEN I'M GOING TO KILL HIM.
YOU DO THAT. I'M GETTING SOME SLEEP. DIDN'T SLEEP WELL LAST NIGHT ....
CAN I HAVE SECONDS?
FRANGELAR'S BEEN A MAN OBSESSED EVER SINCE WE STARTED BOMBING TOKYO LATE LAST YEAR.
YEAH. HE LIKES DOING IT TOO MUCH. HAVE YOU NOTICED HOW LITTLE HE SLEEPS AND HOW MUCH HE EATS?

HE'S PATHETIC IF YOU ASK ME. ALL HE LIVES FOR IS KILLING JAPS.

A REAL BOMBER PILOT DOESN'T OBSESS HIMSELF WITH KILLING ALL CIVILIANS IN HIS WAY.

IS THAT ANY DIFFERENT THAN WHAT WE AND THE BRITISH DID TO GERMANY EARLIER IN THE WAR?

DON'T FORGET WHAT THEY DID TO WARSAW, LONDON, AND MANY OTHER CITIES. IF YOU ASK ME ALL OF US ON BOTH SIDES ARE MASS MURDERERS.

AND DON'T FORGET ALL THE SHIT THE JAPS HAVE BEEN DOING IN SPADES OVER HERE.

NANKING, PEARL HARBOR, THE BATAAN DEATH MARCH, AND MORE! NEVER FORGET THOSE, GENTS!

MASS MURDERERS? NO! WE'RE TRYING TO STOP THE REAL MASS MURDERERS, THE FUCKING JAPANESE!!

AND I FOR ONE AM NOT GOING TO STOP UNTIL I BOMB THE SHIT OUT OF EVERY FUCKING LAST ONE OF 'EM!!

NO. I'M STAYING HERE.

IT'S NO GOOD! WE CAN'T SAVE ANYTHING! GO SAVE YOURSELF!

I WILL PROTECT THIS PLACE FOR AS LONG AS I CAN.

ALL RIGHT! WE'LL START AT THE EDGE OF THE CITY AND CARPET BOMB IN TURN UNTIL THERE'S FUCKING NOTHING LEFT!!!

D.B.FRANGELAR

WUSSIES! THE SMELL OF BARBECUED JAP MAKES MY DAY! AHHHH, ISN'T THAT EXHILARATING!

THE REST OF US ARE ON THE VERGE OF THROWING UP.

I HOPE YOU'RE ENJOYING THE STENCH, CAPTAIN FRANGLER.

WHAT A PLEASANTLY WONDERFUL SMELL!

THEY'RE HITTING EVERY WARD, EVEN THE RESIDENTIAL ONES! WHAT FIENDS!!

THIS TIME I'LL DO THE JOB RIGHT!!!

SO IT'S YOU AGAIN! THAT EXPLAINS THE CARNAGE! I THOUGHT I SHOT YOU DOWN TWO YEARS AGO!

BANZAI!!!

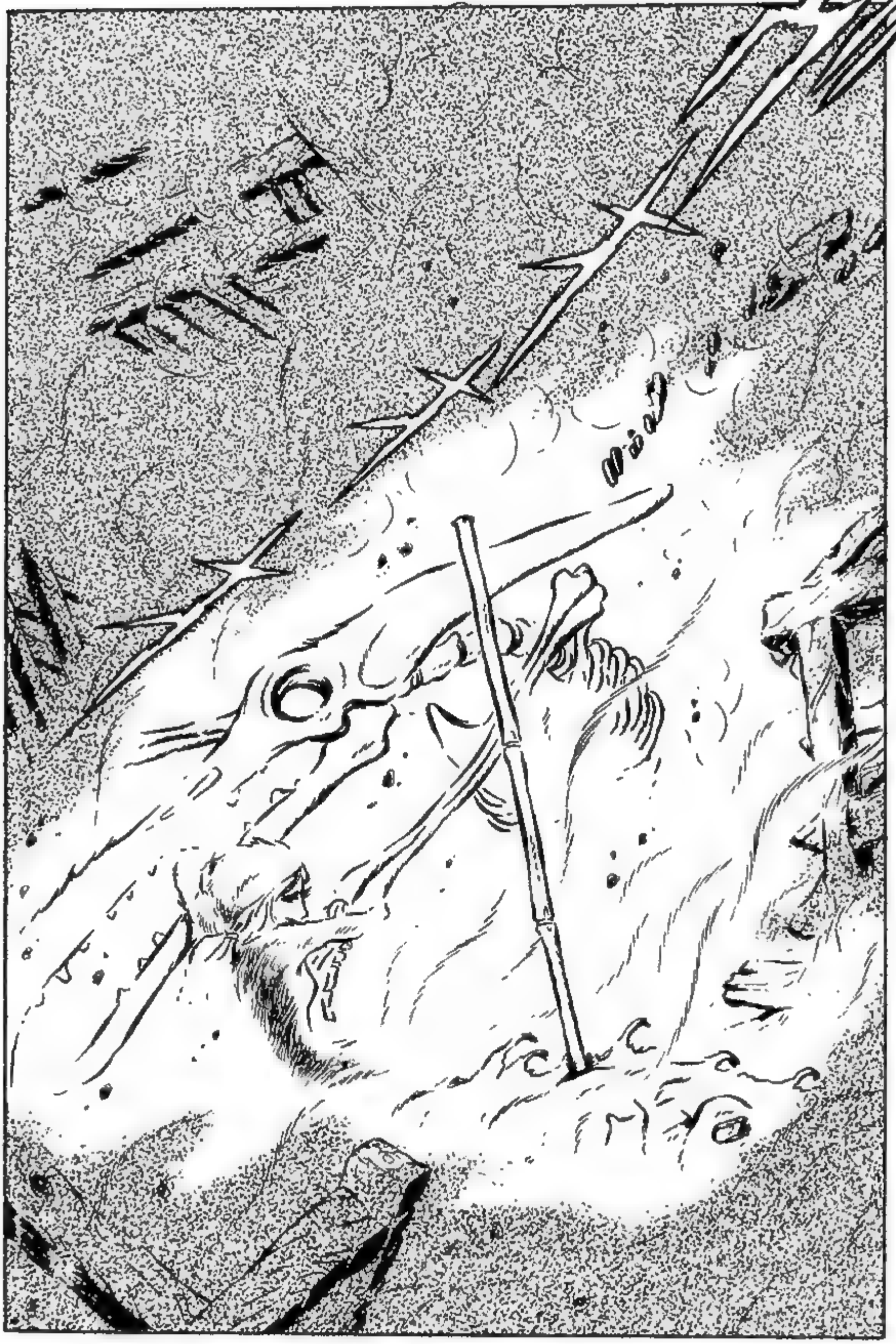
MOTHER FUCKER!

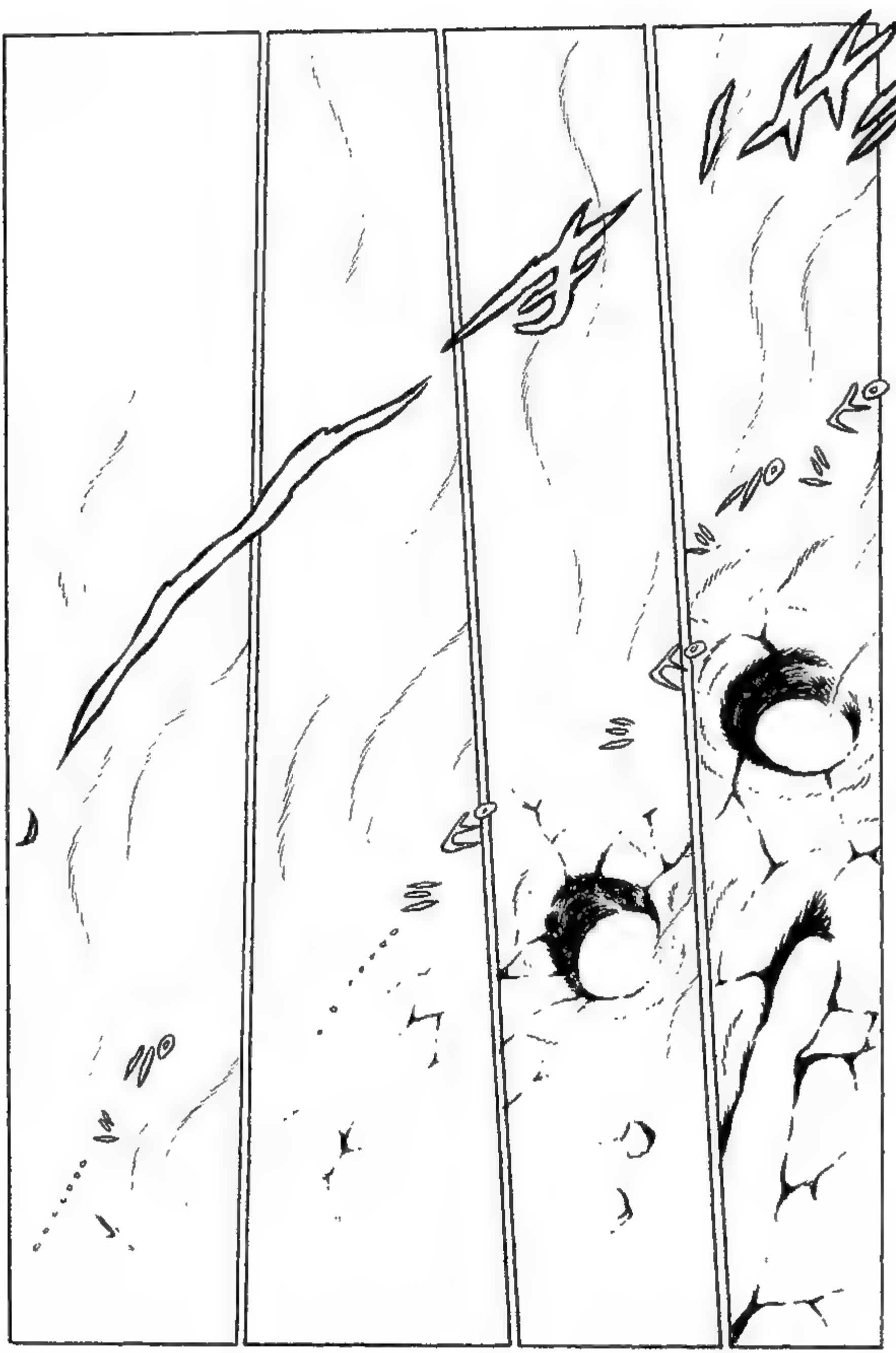
WHAT THE FUCK?!

AS THESE OLD BONES BURN, AND AS MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS BURN, SO TOO WILL YOUR BODY BURN!

DIE

YANK!!





THE PTERODACTYLS ARE NO MORE WHILE THE STRATEGIC BOMBER'S DAYS ARE LIKEWISE NUMBERED, BOMBERS STILL REMAIN WITH US FOR OTHER REASONS WILL THERE EVER COME A DAY WHEN THEIR BONES TOO WILL BE ALL THAT IS LEFT OF THEM FOR THE FUTURE TO PONDER?
ENDE

(Published in Big Comic Original, February 20, 1978 issue)

THE AGE OF THE PTERODACTYL

MANDELISMS

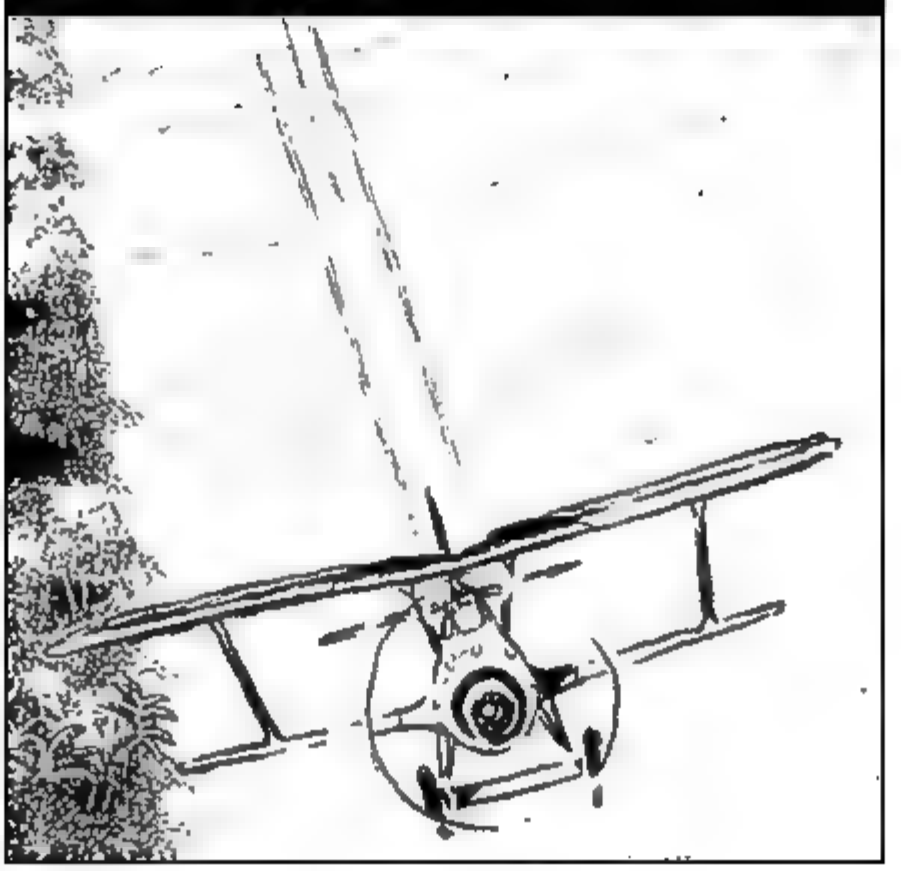
"The Age of the Pterodactyl" is not only one of the strongest "Japanese" tales in *The Cockpit* but also one of its strongest anti-war stories Others more learned than I have commented on the anti-war theme that often appears in Matsumoto's works and this is a good example He drives his point home with the Japanese perspective of Operation Meetinghouse (March 9-10, 1945), the deliberate and massive firebombing of Japan's main city of Tokyo by the U S Army Air Force. He also takes the time to balance this against such actions by both sides earlier in the war, the Germans early in the war and the Allies against the Germans later on, in order to drive home his question of why is it necessary to wage war on civilians for the sheer sake of killing them out of whatever hatreds have been generated by war? There is an answer to that, of course, a sad one and yet a true one that has been a deliberate part of armed conflict since Sherman's march through Georgia during the American Civil War in late 1864 -- possibly even earlier, although I'm going with the modern definition of "total war " In that one of the best ways to stop an enemy is to completely and utterly destroy the civilian infrastructure that both enables and supports his ability to make war. If only it stopped there ... but it never does Personal, racial, religious, and ultimately national desires for revenge always become involved, and the academic is quickly dispensed with in favor of making one's victory as "total" as possible in every sense of the word Of course this instills in the survivors on the other side an equal hatred and desire to get even and "settle the score," and ... well ... you know

This is the second time that Matsumoto has dealt with the bombing of Tokyo in *The Cockpit*. You might remember the first back in Volume 1, "High Altitude Fighter." I figure you and I are going to get an earful from certain American readers in the audience, and I remind you now as I did then he was alive and living in Japan at the time this happened The wartime experiences he lived were quite different from us Westerners, even those of us who have been in service or perhaps even seen real combat in some way. You need to keep that in mind and chose your words instead of shooting off at the hip, as we Americans are known for doing (sad smile) His is not the only perspective I know, but you need to take it into account all the same

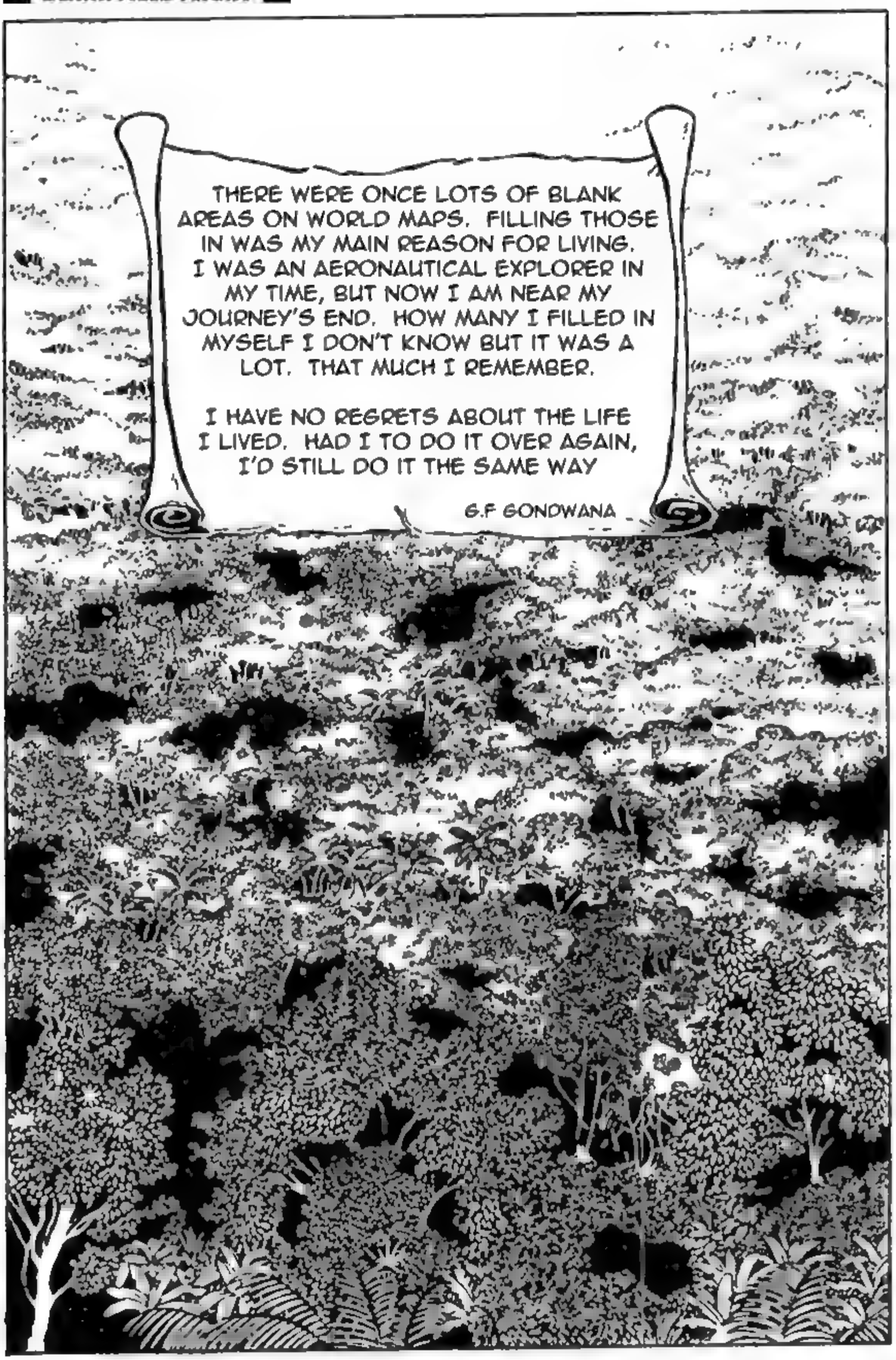
Enough of that Remember my pointing out in the past that you need to look for any underlying or secondary themes in many of Matsumoto's military works? There's definitely one here and that's the debate that was raging during the early part of the Cold War as to the future of the large, long range strategic bomber I think that's why Matsusmoto ends his story with a quite recognizable mainstay of the Cold War, the American B-52 Stratofortress and the direct descendant of the B-29 Superfortress, flying into the sunset on the last page of his tale While the strategic bomber hasn't gone away completely in the face of first ballistic and then cruise missles being developed during the Cold War, it has been proven time and again since the war ended that there are still sometimes certain missions for which a manned strategic bomber is still best suited. That said there are plenty of aircraft boneyards full of them, and I'll let the rest of you take this topic from there

TALES FROM THE COCKPIT

BLANK FIELD FLIGHT



BLANK FIELD FLIGHT


THERE WERE ONCE LOTS OF BLANK AREAS ON WORLD MAPS. FILLING THOSE IN WAS MY MAIN REASON FOR LIVING. I WAS AN AERONAUTICAL EXPLORER IN MY TIME, BUT NOW I AM NEAR MY JOURNEY'S END. HOW MANY I FILLED IN MYSELF I DON'T KNOW BUT IT WAS A LOT. THAT MUCH I REMEMBER.
I HAVE NO REGRETS ABOUT THE LIFE I LIVED. HAD I TO DO IT OVER AGAIN, I'D STILL DO IT THE SAME WAY
G.F GONDWANA

BLANK FIELD FLIGHT

THERE WAS ONE LAST BLANK MAP FIELD I WANTED TO FILL.
I HAD AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER ON MY JOURNEY, AND BECAUSE OF THAT THE BLANK FIELD REMAINS.
DID I FAIL?
NO. IT NEEDED TO STAY BLANK.

IT WAS THE YEAR 1923. I WAS ON THE SAVANTE RIVER, A TRIBUTARY OF THE AMAZON.
THEN AGAIN, JAGUAR STEW ISN'T HALF BAD ONCE YOU COOK IT RIGHT. IT'S ALL IN WHAT YOU LIKE OR DON'T LIKE.
TOO BAD THIS ISN'T BEEF STEW. WE'D HAVE US A RIGHT PROPER EUROPEAN SPOT IF IT WERE.

I DON'T LIKE THIS PLACE. IT SMELLS OF BLOOD AND WILD BEASTS.

AT THE RISK OF OFFENDING YOU I THINK YOU HAVE THE SAME SMELL, GONDWANA.

I'M NOT OFFENDED. SO DO I OFFEND YOU OR MY SMELL?

THAT'S A DANGEROUS SMELL. YOU CAN BE A DANGEROUS MAN. I ... I'LL TOLERATE IT.

HOW'S THE AIRPLANE? IS IT IN GOOD SHAPE?

VERY GOOD. IT'S DESIGNED TO RUN IN HOT CLIMATES LIKE THIS. IT'S RUNNING LIKE A TOP.

IT'S NOT SO GOOD IN COLD. THAT TRIP TO THE ARCTIC FROM ALASKA WAS CLOSE.

MY ENGINE WAS SHAKING AND SO WAS I! HA-HA-HAH!!

STILL, I MANAGED TO FILL IN 48 MORE BLANK AREAS ON THE MAPS.

I ALSO LOST MY LEFT HAND TO SEVERE FROSTBITE. I WAS ROYALLY PISSED, YOU KNOW.

I CAN NOW SEE WHY YOU WANTED THIS JOB. IT'S A SORT OF LIVING ADVENTURE, ISN'T IT?

WERE THERE ANY OTHER REASONS FOR TAKING IT, GONDWANA?

YOU, IRENE. I STILL HAVE A BLANK SPACE IN MY LIFE THAT YOU WOULD FILL QUITE WELL, IF YOU'RE WILLING.

I'M GLAD YOU CAME ALONG. I'M GLAD YOU'RE HERE. YOU MAKE THIS TRIP THE BEST OF ALL.

IRENE HAD GONE OUT OF HER WAY TO COME ALONG. I WAS IMPRESSED THEN ....

SHE SHARED A SIMILAR BACKGROUND AS MINE. BOTH COLONIAL KIDS, GROWING UP POOR, FIGHTING FOR WHATEVER WE COULD GET IN LIFE ....
SHE WAS ALSO THE ONE WHO HAD BROUGHT ALONG THE GRAMOPHONE.
I DIDN'T MIND. THE MUSIC HELPED DISTRACT OUR ATTENTION FROM THE MOSQUITOES ON THAT MOONLIT NIGHT ....
THAT NIGHT I DIDN'T THINK OF BLANK FIELDS ON MAPS. I THOUGHT OF HOW IRENE FILLED MINE.
SHE FILLED THE BLANK FIELD IN MY OWN LIFE, FULLY AND COMPLETELY.

I FOUND YOUR CAMP AND FIRED OFF A SHOT TO GET YOUR ATTENTION.

SORRY! I WAS LOST.

YOU'RE A HUNTER. HUNTERS DON'T GET LOST.

THIS ONE DOES.

WHO'S THERE! SHOW YOUR SELF!!

DON'T MIND IF I DO. THANKS.

MY NAME'S GONDWANA. THIS IS IRENE. HELP YOURSELF TO SOME COLD JAGUAR STEW.

COLD, LIKE YOU SAID, BUT STILL VERY FILLING TO A HUNGRY MAN.

HOW IS IT?

I'M USED TO IT.

NICE PIECE. A NITRO EXPRESS OVER-UNDER .577 ELEPHANT GUN, IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN. TOO MUCH GUN FOR HERE.

I'M AFRAID THAT'S ALL WE'VE GOT FOR NOW.

THANKS. I'M GRATEFUL. I'LL FIND MY WAY BACK TO MY OWN CAMP IN THE MORNING.

WELL, YOU CAN SLEEP IN OUR SUPPLY TENT BACK THERE.

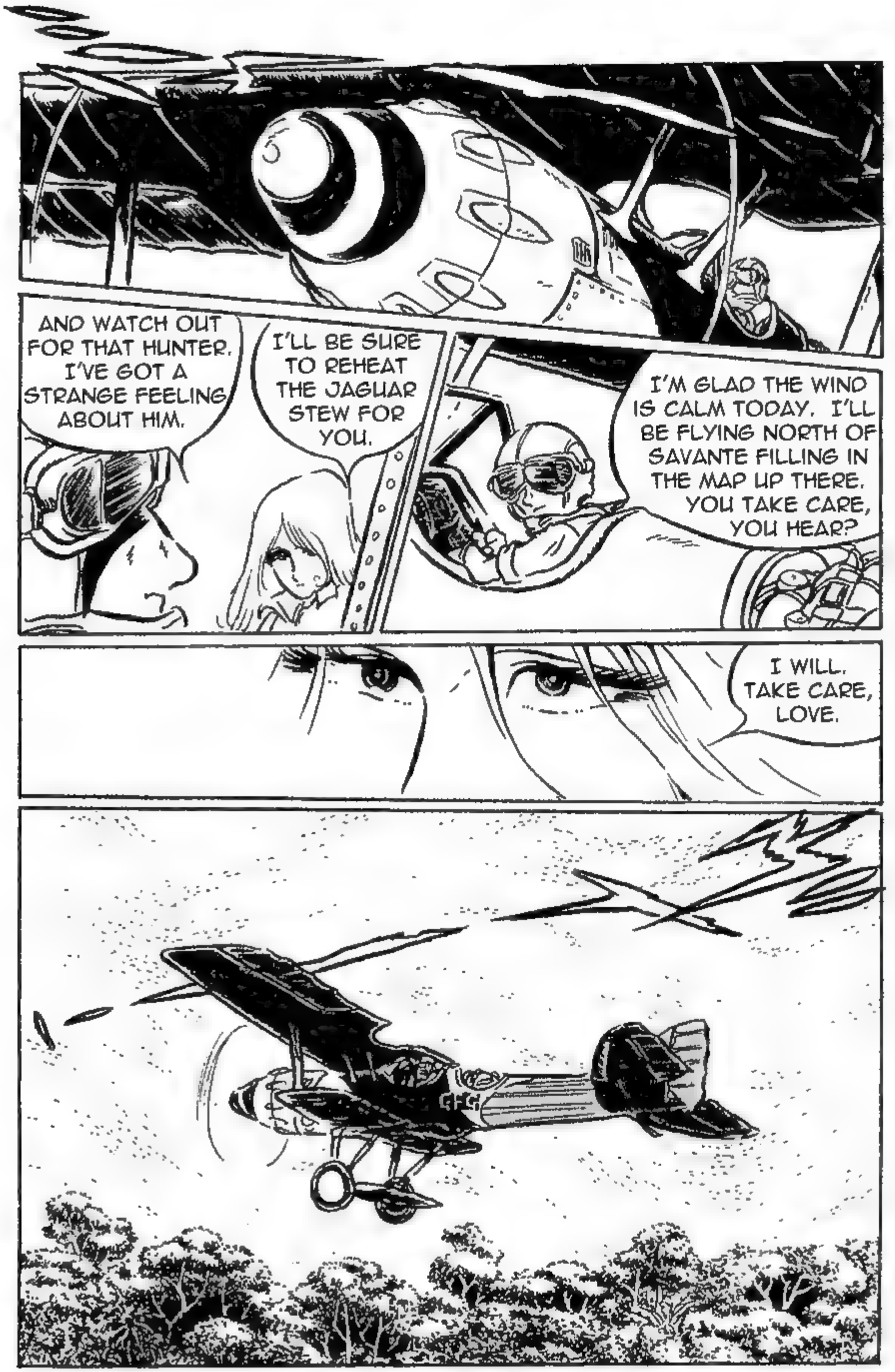
I KEPT HALF AN EYE ON HIM. HE DELIBERATELY AVOIDED GIVING HIS NAME, AND THERE WAS THAT GUN ....

TRUTH TO TELL I DIDN'T KNOW IF HE HAD OR HADN'T. AT LEAST IRENE HAD HER OWN PISTOL AND KNEW HOW TO USE IT.

I TOLD IRENE THAT HE PROBABLY HEADED BACK TO HIS CAMP LIKE HE SAID HE WOULD.

WHEN WE GOT UP IN THE MORNING THE MAN WAS GONE.

OF WHAT USE IS AN ELEPHANT GUN IN THE AMAZON? I HAD SERIOUS MISGIVINGS ABOUT OUR GUEST.


AND WATCH OUT FOR THAT HUNTER. I'VE GOT A STRANGE FEELING ABOUT HIM.
I'LL BE SURE TO REHEAT THE JAGUAR STEW FOR YOU.
I'M GLAD THE WIND IS CALM TODAY. I'LL BE FLYING NORTH OF SAVANTE FILLING IN THE MAP UP THERE. YOU TAKE CARE, YOU HEAR?
I WILL. TAKE CARE, LOVE.

WE PILOTS USED TO NAME OUR PLANES BACK IN THOSE DAYS. MINE WAS NAMED "ATLANTIS," AND SHE WAS RUNNING LIKE A TOP!

AS I FLEW MY MIND WANDERED BACK TO THE WAR, AND FIGHTING WITH THE GERMAN BLACK SQUADRON OVER THE FRONT.

I ALSO THOUGHT OF FLYING OVER THOSE GREAT CITIES IN MORE PEACEFUL TIMES.

I HAD TRADED ONE SET OF EPIC SCENERY FOR ANOTHER -- IN THIS CASE THE GREAT AMAZON JUNGLES.

IT LOOKS LIKE ... IT *CAN'T* BE!

WHAT IS THAT? AM I SEEING THINGS?

ALMOST THERE! MAP BLANK FIELD COMING UP! NOW TO ...

NO!!!

DAMN BIRD! WHY'D IT HAVE TO DROP IT ON MY ENGINE?! OH BOY, NOW I'M IN REAL TROUBLE!

DON'T DIE! I NEED TO FIND SOME PLACE OPEN TO LAND!

THAT TIME, THOUGH, I THOUGHT I HAD BOUGHT THE PROVERBIAL FARM.

I HAVE HAD TO FACE DEATH MANY TIMES IN MY LIFE. AS A YOUNG MAN IN THE GREAT WAR, AND ON MY MANY AERIAL EXPLORATIONS SINCE.

FOR YOU SEE, THERE ARE NO OPEN SPACES IN THE JUNGLE UNLESS MAN OR NATURE MAKES THEM.

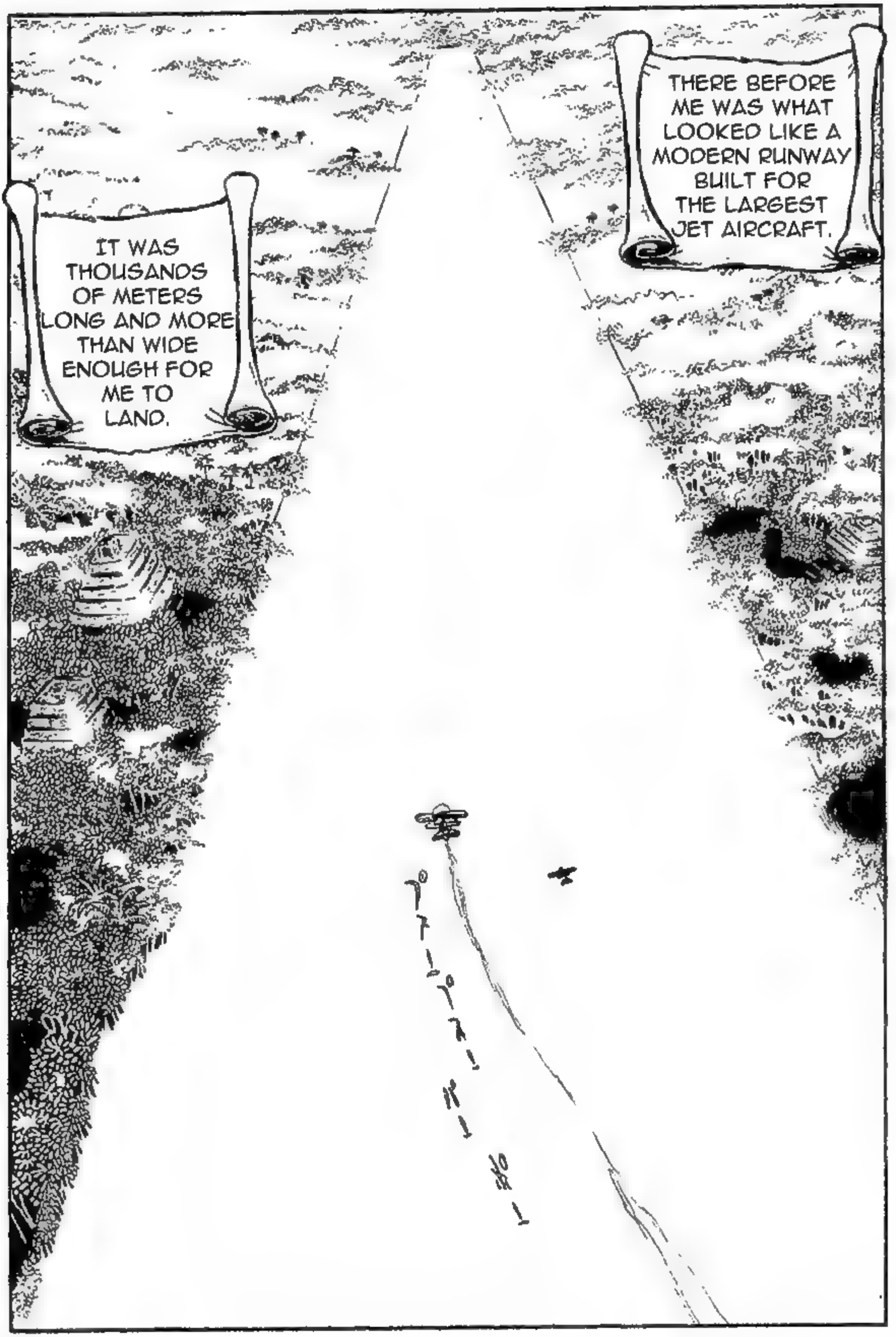
I HAD ALMOST GIVEN UP HOPE AND WAS GETTING READY TO CRASH WHEN A MIRACLE OCCURED, AND A HOPE UNLOOKED FOR UNVEILED ITSELF BEFORE MY STARTLED EYES.

FURTHERMORE IT IS SO COVERED WITH GROWTH AND OVERHANG THAT I COULDN'T DITCH IN THAT.

I WAS FAR UPSTREAM OVER THE SAVANTE. IT'S BARELY BIG ENOUGH TO CALL A RIVER.

I WAS IN UTTER AMAZEMENT AT WHAT I SAW. YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN TOO HAD YOU BEEN THERE.

BLANK FIELD FLIGHT


IT WAS THOUSANDS OF METERS LONG AND MORE THAN WIDE ENOUGH FOR ME TO LAND.
THERE BEFORE ME WAS WHAT LOOKED LIKE A MODERN RUNWAY BUILT FOR THE LARGEST JET AIRCRAFT.

NOW ABOUT THIS.

AND QUITE SOLID TOO!

I'M NOT DREAMING. THIS IS VERY REAL.

WHAT'S THIS?

LOOKS LIKE AN ANCIENT PAVING STONE.

THIS WAS SHAPED BY HUMAN HANDS.

MY GOD! A GOLD-COATED PAVING STONE! AND IF THE OTHERS ....

THE OUTER FACE HAS BEEN COATED IN GOLD!

UNDER THE MOSS ... !

LET'S SEE.

I'LL BET THE NEARBY BUILDINGS ARE TOO! ONLY THE OVERGROWTH PREVENTS IT FROM BEING SEEN!

THE WHOLE THING IS COATED IN GOLD!

MORE GOLD PAVING STONES!

IT WASN'T EL DORADO, AS THAT WAS UP NORTH, BUT THERE WAS NO DOUBT IT WAS ITS BROTHER OR A CLOSE RELATIVE.

THIS ... THIS PLACE ... IT'S WORTH A FORTUNE!

I WAS LUCKY I HAD LANDED IN AN INTACT SECTION.

AS FOR THOSE STRANGE LONG NECKED CROWS, THEY HAD BEEN USING THEIR UNUSUALLY LONG BEAKS LIKE CROWBARS TO POP THE STONES FOR THEIR OWN USES.

WAS IT THE STONE, THE GOLD COATING, OR THE MOSS?

I NEVER FOUND OUT WHAT THEY DID WITH THEM.

IT DIDN'T MATTER NOW THAT I KNEW ABOUT THIS PLACE I HAD A DECISION TO MAKE.

I HAD SEEN THAT HAPPEN MORE THAN ONCE AFTER A BLANK MAP FIELD WAS FILLED.

IF I TELL THE WORLD ABOUT THIS PLACE IT'LL BE LOOTED AND DESTROYED.

I HAD NOT ANTICIPATED THIS FIND IN THIS PARTICULAR BLANK FIELD, AND IT TROUBLED MY HEART WHAT MAN WOULD DO TO IT.

FORTUNATELY I HAD THE MEANS TO MELT SOME OF THE GOLD TO MAKE A CRUDE REPLACEMENT. IT WOULD DO UNTIL I COULD GET BACK TO CIVILIZATION AND GET A PROPER ONE.

ONE OF THE CYLINDERS HAD BEEN CRACKED BY THE CROW'S STONE.

I DISTRACTED MYSELF WITH FIXING MY ENGINE. I ALWAYS CARRIED TOOLS ....

I FELT AS IF THEIR GHOSTS WATCHED ME AS I WORKED, IMPATIENT FOR ME TO LEAVE.

AS I WORKED I SAW A BLACK JAGUAR ZIP ACROSS THAT RUNWAY LIKE THE WIND. IT MADE ME WONDER ABOUT THOSE WHO HAD MADE THIS PLACE, AND WERE LONG GONE.

THE REPAIR TOOK TWO DAYS WITH TESTING, BUT AT ITS END I WAS AIRBORNE AGAIN.

AS I TOOK OFF I TOOK ONE LAST LOOK AT THE GOLDEN COATING REVEALED BY MY WHEEL TRACKS IN THAT ANCIENT RUNWAY. IT WAS THEN THAT I DECIDED I WOULD NEVER FILL IN THIS PARTICULAR BLANK MAP FIELD.

I WAS ALMOST OUT OF FUEL BY THE TIME I LANDED AT MY CAMP ON THE SAVANTE.

I THEN FOUND OUT THAT IRENE HAD LEFT.

SHE RIFLED MY MAP NOTES! WHY?

THEY SEEMED TO GET ALONG VERY WELL, AS IF THEY WERE OLD FRIENDS! THEY LEFT UPRIVER IN THE SAME DIRECTION YOU FLEW! THAT IS ALL WE KNOW!

A FULL DAY AFTER YOU LEFT, SIR!

YOU SAY SHE LEFT WITH THE HUNTER?

THE NATIVE PORTERS HAD THE ANSWER, AND I ADMIT IT WAS ONE I SHOULD HAVE EXPECTED.

FIFTEEN YEARS, SUNFIELD. HAS IT REALLY BEEN THAT LONG?

I THINK I KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON.

REFUEL MY PLANE.

WE THINK THEY WENT AFTER YOU, BUT IF YOU CAME BACK WITHOUT THEM--

I WAS BEGINNING TO WORRY. I MEAN, WHEN GONDWANA DIDN'T RETURN I BEGAN SEARCHING HIS THINGS FOR HIS MAP NOTES.

I'M GLAD I FOUND YOU. IT MAKES THIS A LOT EASIER, YOU KNOW.

THE LEGEND OF THE GOLDEN CITY IS VERY REAL, IRENE. FROM ALL THE EVIDENCE I'VE GATHERED IT MUST BE SOMEWHERE IN THIS AREA.

HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN BACK YESTERDAY. I'M GUESSING HE CRASHED SOMEWHERE.

OHH, SUNFIELD! OOOHH!!

I WANT YOU SO BAD ...

SPEAKING OF HARD, IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I TASTED YOU, IRENE. I WANT YOU.

WITHOUT HIM TO FIND IT FOR US WE'LL HAVE TO DO IT THE HARD WAY.

WHAT TH--?!

"FOOL ME ONCE, SHAME ON YOU. FOOL ME TWICE, SHAME ON ME."

YOU KNOW THE OLD SAYING ....

THAT SON OF A BITCH. THAT FUCKING SON OF A *BITCH!!*

I LEFT THEM TO THEIR OWN DEVICES. I LATER LEARNED THAT WHAT WAS LEFT OF THEM WAS EVENTUALLY FOUND FAR UP THE SAVANTE.

... NOT EVEN ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THOSE TWO.

I HAVE NO REGRETS ABOUT THE LIFE I LIVED ...

IT ALSO DOESN'T SHOW UP IN MODERN SATELLITE IMAGING, LIKE A LOT OF OTHER BLANK FIELDS EITHER NATURAL OR ARTIFICIAL.

THE LEGEND OF THE GOLDEN CITY OF THE ANCIENTS IN THE AMAZON HAS REMAINED JUST THAT EVEN IN THIS MODERN AGE. SEVERAL EXPEDITIONS HAVE SINCE BEEN MOUNTED TO FIND IT BUT ALL HAVE FAILED. AS TO PRIVATE EFFORTS I DO NOT KNOW.

THERE ARE PROVEN WAYS FOR MAN TO HIDE HIS SECRETS FROM MODERN TECHNOLOGY. PERHAPS NATURE FOUND ITS OWN LONG AGO.

I, G.L. GONDWARA, HAVE NOW COME TO THE END OF A LONG AND FULFILLING LIFE.

IT EXISTS, THOUGH. I'M THE ONLY LIVING MODERN MAN WHO HAS SEEN IT.

AT THIS TIME MY MEMORY GOES BACK TO IRENE, WHAT WE HAD, AND WHAT MORE WE MIGHT HAVE HAD HAD SHE NOT BETRAYED ME.

PERHAPS SOME BLANK FIELDS ARE MEANT TO STAY BLANK, BOTH IN THE WORLD AND IN THE HEART.

THE GOLDEN CITY, WITH ITS GOLDEN RUNWAY ....

THAT IS THE LESSON I PASS ON TO YOU, READER. IN THIS WORLD AND IN THIS LIFE THERE ARE SOME BLANK FIELDS THAT ARE MEANT TO REMAIN BLANK.
ENDE

(Published in Big Comic Original, March 5, 1978 issue)

MANDELISMS

"Blank Field Flight" is the only tale in the original nine tankoban publishing of *The Cockpit* that is not set either in part or in whole during World War II It is set in 1923 during the interwar period So why is it here? Three possible reasons come immediately to mind First, Matsumoto wanted it here That's a given Second, the interwar period is best known to most of us today as the last great Age of Adventure, when there were large parts of the world that were still unknown and could only be represented by "blank fields" on a map Hence Matsumoto's title for his tale Those with the financing and resources were still able to mount expeditions to these unknown areas either in public or in private and have all sorts of adventures while doing so Third, this last great Age of Adventure is often connected with the start of World War II given that one happens right after the other I think the great but short-lived TV series *Tales of the Gold Monkey* highlights this best, but I'm sure many of you can cite your own examples Those are three good reasons for this tale to be included in *The Cockpit* I'm sure you can think of more

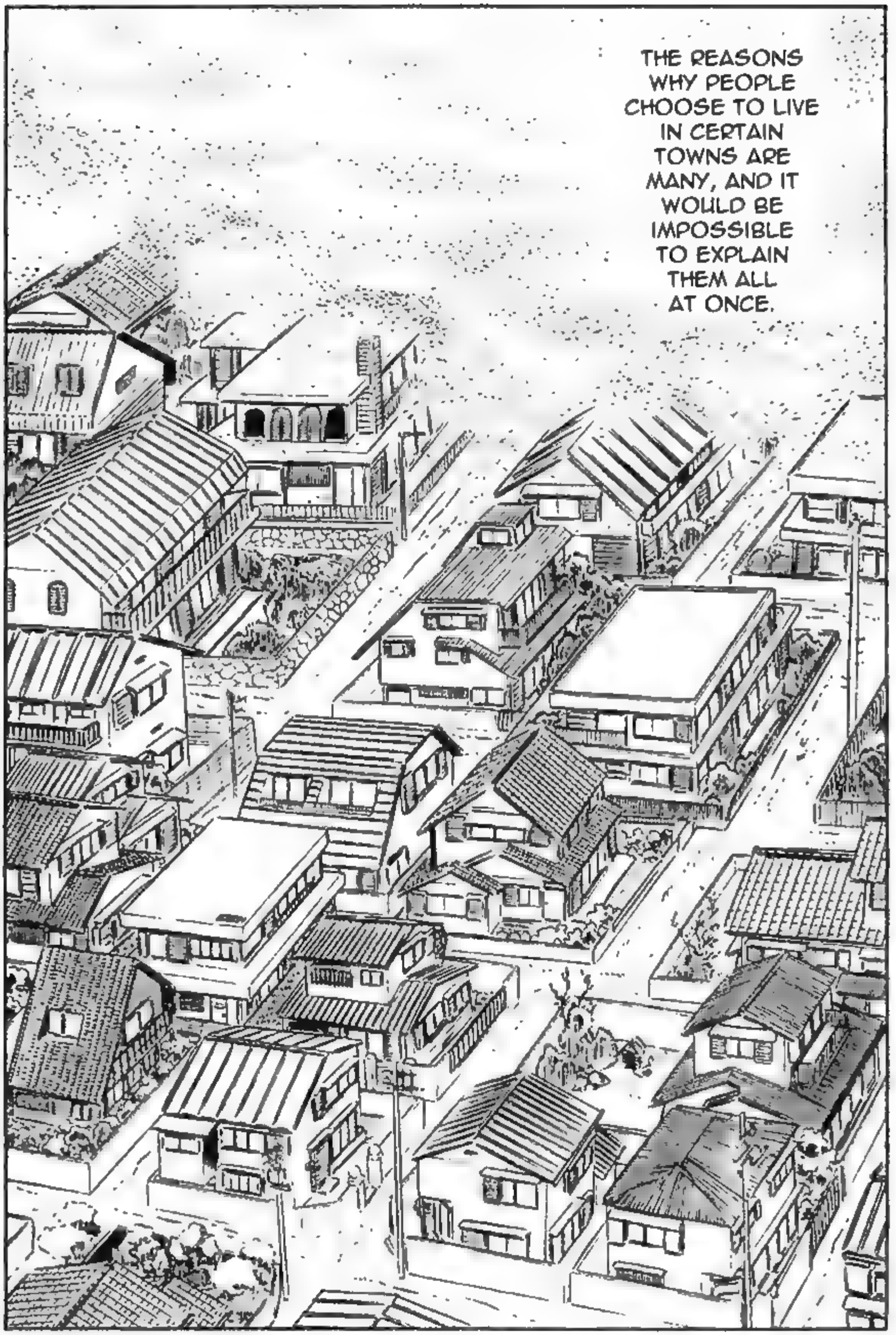
As I let Google Translate AI do its thing and then rewrote its gibberish into something readable, I was struck by how relevant "Blank Field Flight" remains today We STILL have blank fields on our most modern maps and satellite imaging Almost all of these are manmade, of course, hiding whatever secrets their creators or inventors want hid, but nonetheless they ARE there You can go on the Internet and find all sorts of examples where modern satellite imaging can't resolve a particular spot on the map and all sorts of conspiracy theories in various blogs as to why That's the great thing about mysteries, though They fire the imagination Maybe that's one of the things that Matsumoto was trying to tell us too Yes, there are some places that need to remain blank fields on the map, but perhaps there are others that are there to inspire us to find out what's there That was the whole purpose of G L Gondwara's life, wasn't it?

The theme of ancient lost cities waiting to be found by modern discoverers is a frequently recurring one in Matsumoto's works, whether they are here on Earth in most of his contemporary tales or on other planets in his sci-fi works In addition to Japan's own rich lore and legends on the matter you have to also take into account that Matsumoto wrote this story during the heyday of both Eric von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods* and Immanuel Velikovsky's *Worlds in Collision* He was apparently also familiar with the works of Zechariah Stichin too, as well as other so-called New Age works of that time Now whether or not you personally believe any of what they said is beside the point The point is that what they said (or claimed, a-hem) makes for great brain fuel for the imagination, and Matsumoto certainly had quite an imagination You can clearly see the influence of *Chariots of the Gods* in this story, with its ancient lost city and mysterious oversized long "runway" evoking the simplier but real world ones that still exist on the Nazca plain in South America. Talk among yourselves

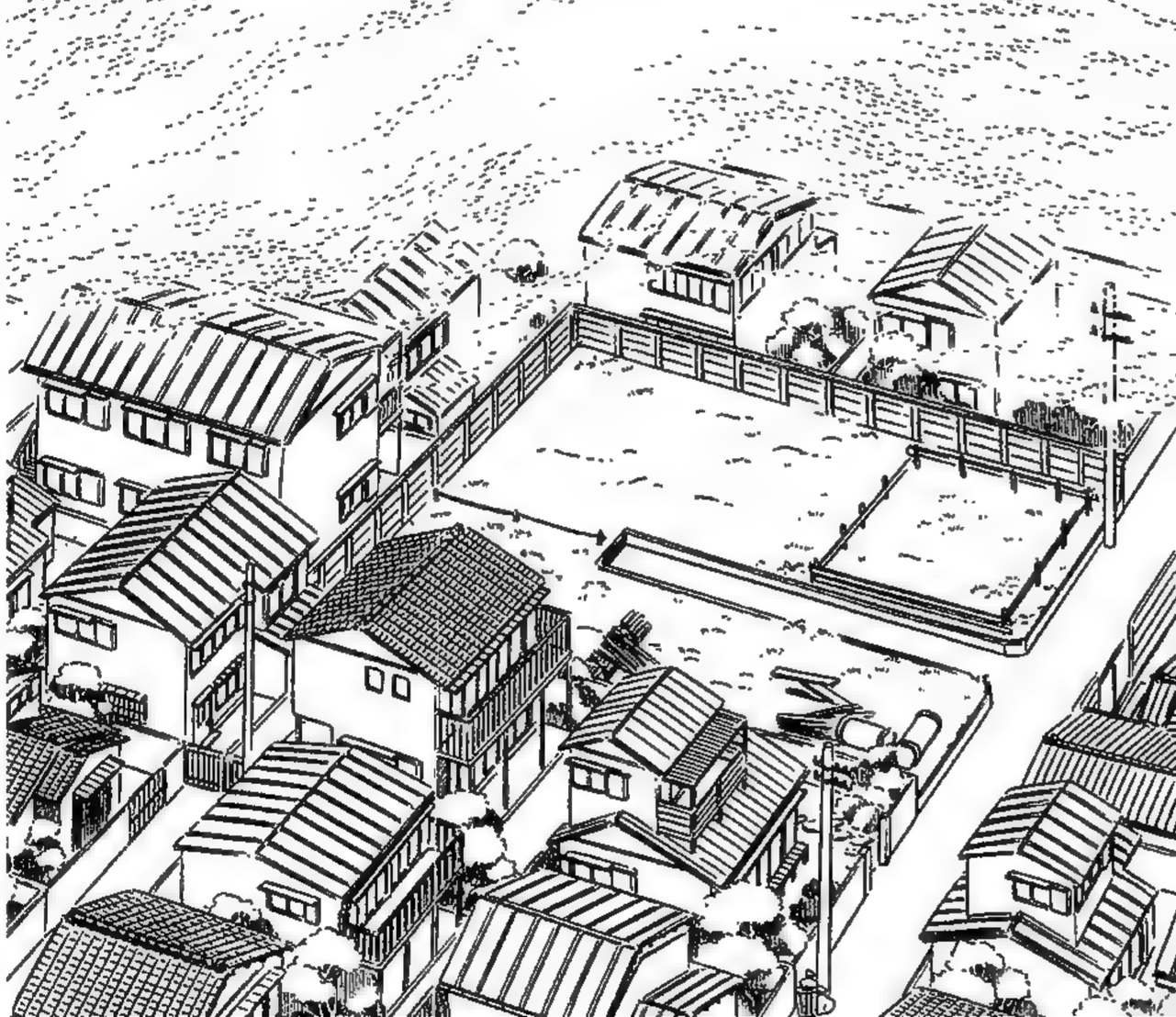
This tale is also one of the very few in the original printing of *The Cockpit* to feature a non-Japanese cast, and I find interesting Matsumoto's choice of characters Sunfield the hunter is obviously British, but Matsumoto makes clear that both Gondwara and Irene are not pure white As a matter of fact the name "Gondwara" is Indian and is a loanworld from ancient Sanskrit for "land of the Gonds," and from where we get the modern term Gondwaraland for one of the ancient supercontinents of Earth theorized by science Irene is twice described as a "colonial child" in the original, once by herself and once by Sunfield in a jokingly half-derogatory way (which I cut from my adaptation due to lack of space in the text bubbles) Gondwara is most likely of mixed British-Indian heritage, and while we don't know Irene's racial makeup she apparently looks white enough to pass as one This is very important at this point in time - the interwar period - given that the British Empire is still in existence and that its cultural and racial predjudices are still very much in play in all parts of the world where it holds sway Irene herself mentions during the story that both she and Gondwara share in common having to literally fight their way out of where British Imperial society would have kept them to get to where they are and what they have become by the time this tale takes place I'm reminded of a character I created for one of my own novels, Lady Angela Ashford from *Projekt Regenschirm*, who owed her unique position in British society solely to the fact that her mother was the servant to a British official in India whose wife couldn't have children, who had a child by this man, and the child (Angela) looked white enough to pass as one and was later adopted by the British official as his own daughter That was based on real events from the time, and I'm sure those of you who know your British colonial history can think of more Racism, whether real or implied, frequently rears its ugly head in *The Cockpit* -- but I'd have to say this is probably one of the more unique examples of it.

TALES FROM THE COCKPIT

RED SKULL


THE REASONS WHY PEOPLE CHOOSE TO LIVE IN CERTAIN TOWNS ARE MANY, AND IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO EXPLAIN THEM ALL AT ONCE.

RED SKULL



HERE IN THIS PARTICULAR TOWN IN JAPAN LIVED TWO RATHER ECCENTRIC MEN WHO BECAME SOMETHING OF A LOCAL LEGEND.

I'M SURE YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW WHY.

THERE IS NOTHING IN THE WORLD LIKE OBSESSION. IT WILL DRIVE ORDINARY PEOPLE TO DO EXTRAORDINARY THINGS.

WELL, IT HAD EVERYTHING TO DO WITH BOTH OF THEM HAVING BEEN IN THE WAR AND BECOMING OBSESSED WITH SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED AFTER IT WAS OVER.

THIS IS THE STORY OF TWO VERY OBSESSED MEN ....

DIG, DIG, DIG, DIG ...
DIG, DIG, DIG ...
'FRAID SO.
HE'S STILL AT IT?!
ONLY WHEN I FIND WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR! DIG ... DIG ...
ARE YOU EVER COMIN' OUTTA THAT HOLE?

I DON'T CARE!

YOU'RE GONNA WEAR YOUR ASS OUT!

YOU'RE NOT A YOUNG MAN!

I'LL KNOW WHEN I FIND IT!

WELL, WHAT IS IT?

GOOD LUCK!

BUT IT'S BREAK TIME! AFTER THAT AND RUNNING ERRANDS, I'LL DIG SOME MORE!

CLAY SOIL ISN'T THE EASIEST TO DIG.

AH! THERE YOU ARE! GOT TIRED ALREADY, I SEE.

BETTER GO CHECK.

I WONDER. IS HE ...?

AS GOOD AS I'M DOING!

OH MY!

WOMAN, DON'T FORGET WHO HAS THE DICK IN THIS MARRIAGE. DON'T YOU TALK TO ME LIKE THAT.

THE NEIGHBORS ARE TALKING! THEY ALL SAY YOU'RE CRAZY! HOW DO I DEAL WITH THAT?

YES I AM. IS THERE A PROBLEM?

THERE YOU ARE! STILL DIGGIN' THAT DAMN HOLE?

YOU ARE A FUCKING DISGRACE TO JAPANESE WOMEN, YOU KNOW THAT?!

THEN HAVE MY FOOT IN YOUR MOUTH!

I'LL TALK TO YOU HOWEVER I LIKE!

AND YOU'RE THE REASON WE'RE CALLED A SMALL DICK NATION!!!

NO I DO NOT, THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

SIGH

HELLO AGAIN. I SEE YOU AND THE WIFE ARE GETTING ALONG AS USUAL. CARE TO TALK ABOUT IT?

DISGRACEFUL WOMAN ... IF ONLY SHE UNDERSTOOD.

OUT.

WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU GOING?

ALTHOUGH YOU MAKE ME WONDER IF IT'S WORTH IT.

YOU DO NOT UNDER-STAND, BITCH. THIS IS FOR OUR NATION'S PRIDE.

YOU'RE GOING OVER THERE AGAIN, AREN'T YOU?! TO SPY ON HIM, AREN'T YOU?! THE WAR'S OVER! WHY CAN'T YOU LET IT GO?!?!

BECAUSE YOU CAN'T I'M STUCK WITH A BIG-ASS HOLE IN MY BACK YARD AND THE LAUGHTER OF ALL OUR NEIGHBORS! DAMN YOU!!!

IF THE POLICE HADN'T TAKEN MY SHOTGUN AWAY FROM ME I'D SHOW HIM. I'D SHOW THEM ALL!

WHAT A DIRTY, FILTHY PLACE IN WHICH TO LIVE!

HOW'S THINGS HERE?

YOU NEED TO SETTLE DOWN, LOVE. THIS MAY NOT BE CALIFORNIA BUT IT IS OUR HOME AND WE NEED TO BE PART OF IT.

GRR ...

I'M JUST GLAD THEY DIDN'T LOCK YOU UP, DEAR.

OKAY, OKAY, OKAY! I'LL SETTLE DOWN, BE MORE NICE! PROMISE!

I BEG YOUR PARDON?

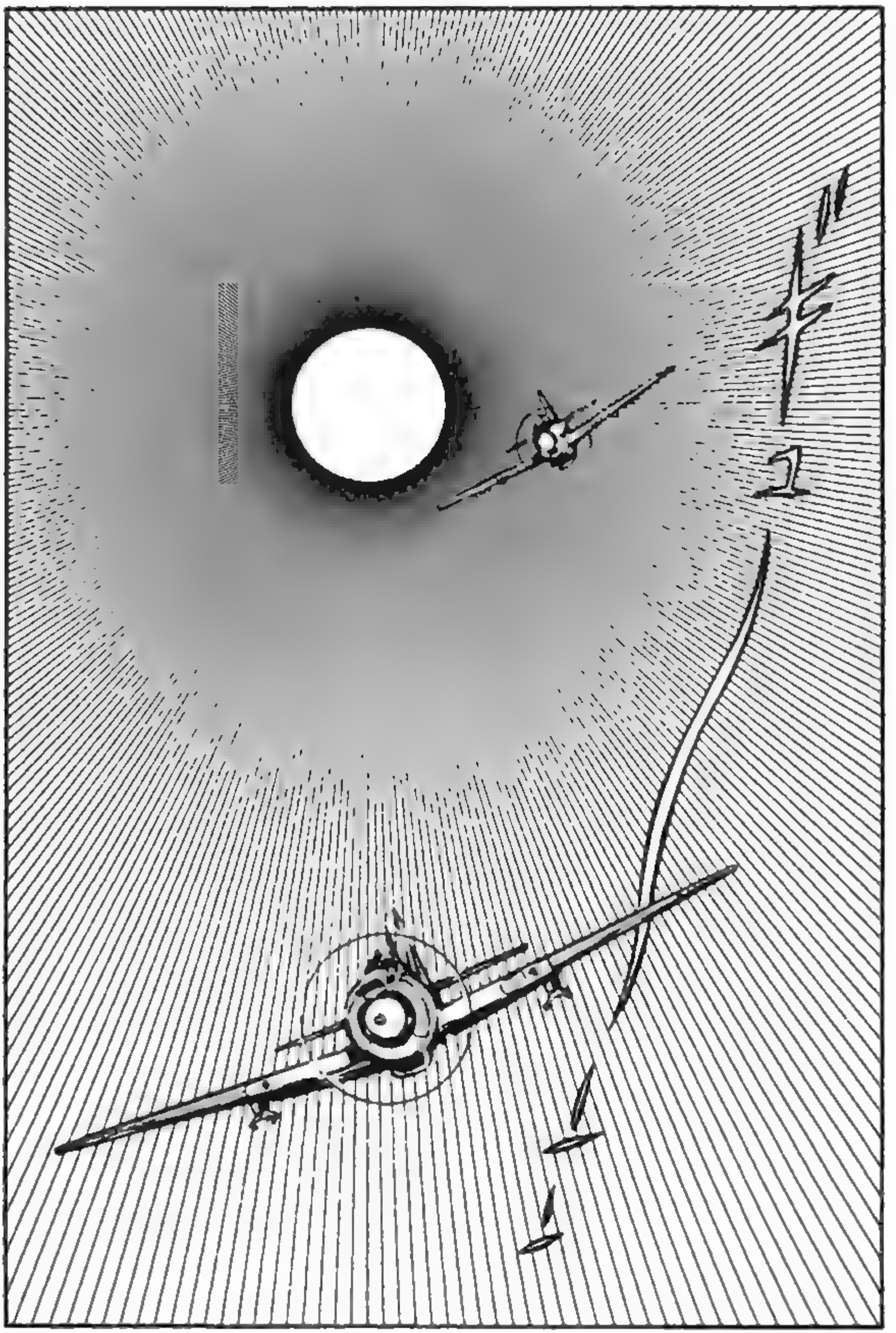
DON'T TALK TO ME LIKE THAT, BITCH!

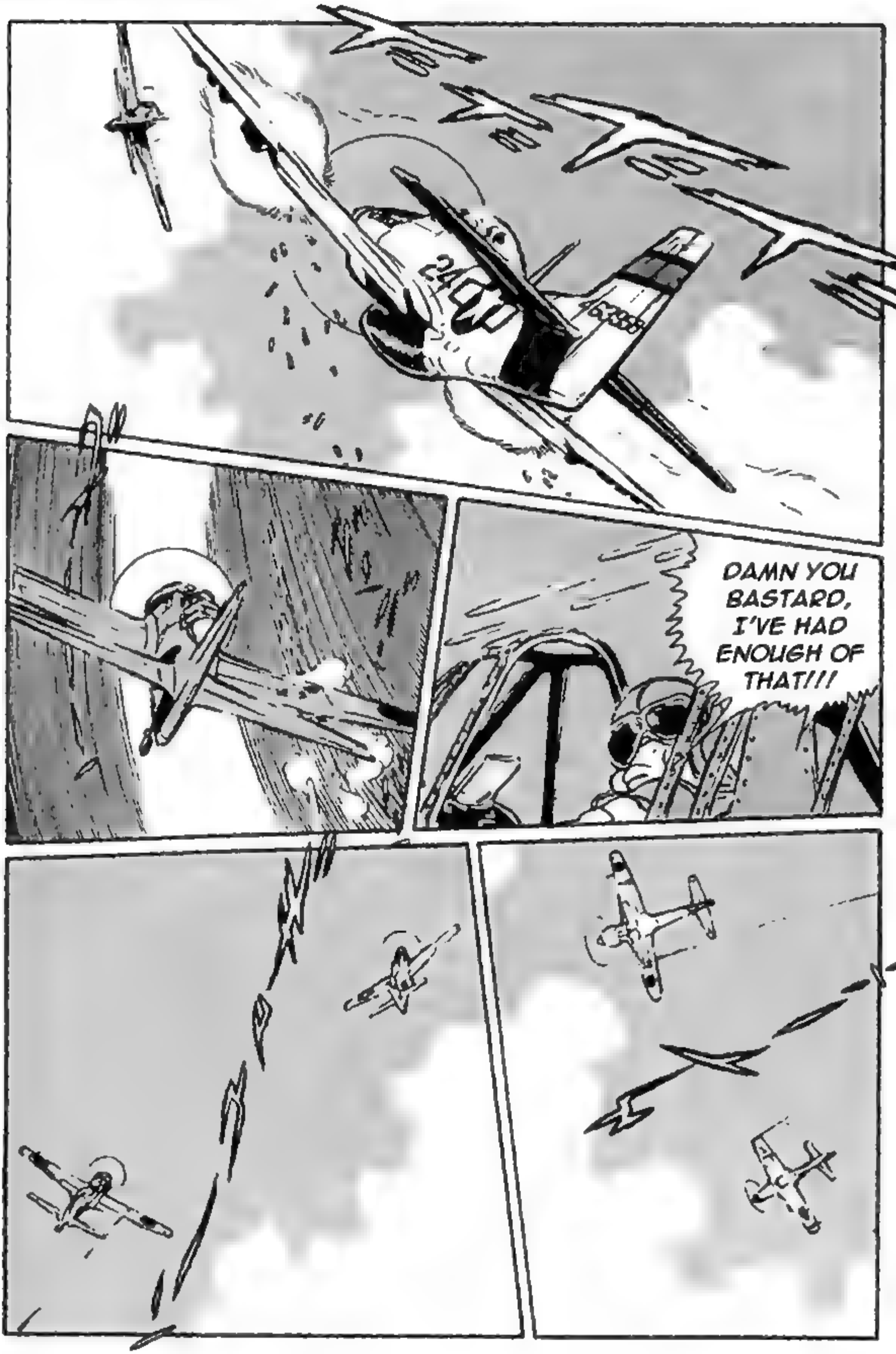
NOW ARE YOU GOING TO BEHAVE, OR DO I HAVE TO GET NASTY ON YOU?

WE'VE BOTH FALLEN A LONG WAY SINCE THE WAR.

HE'S GOT IT AS BAD AS I DO.

SIGH

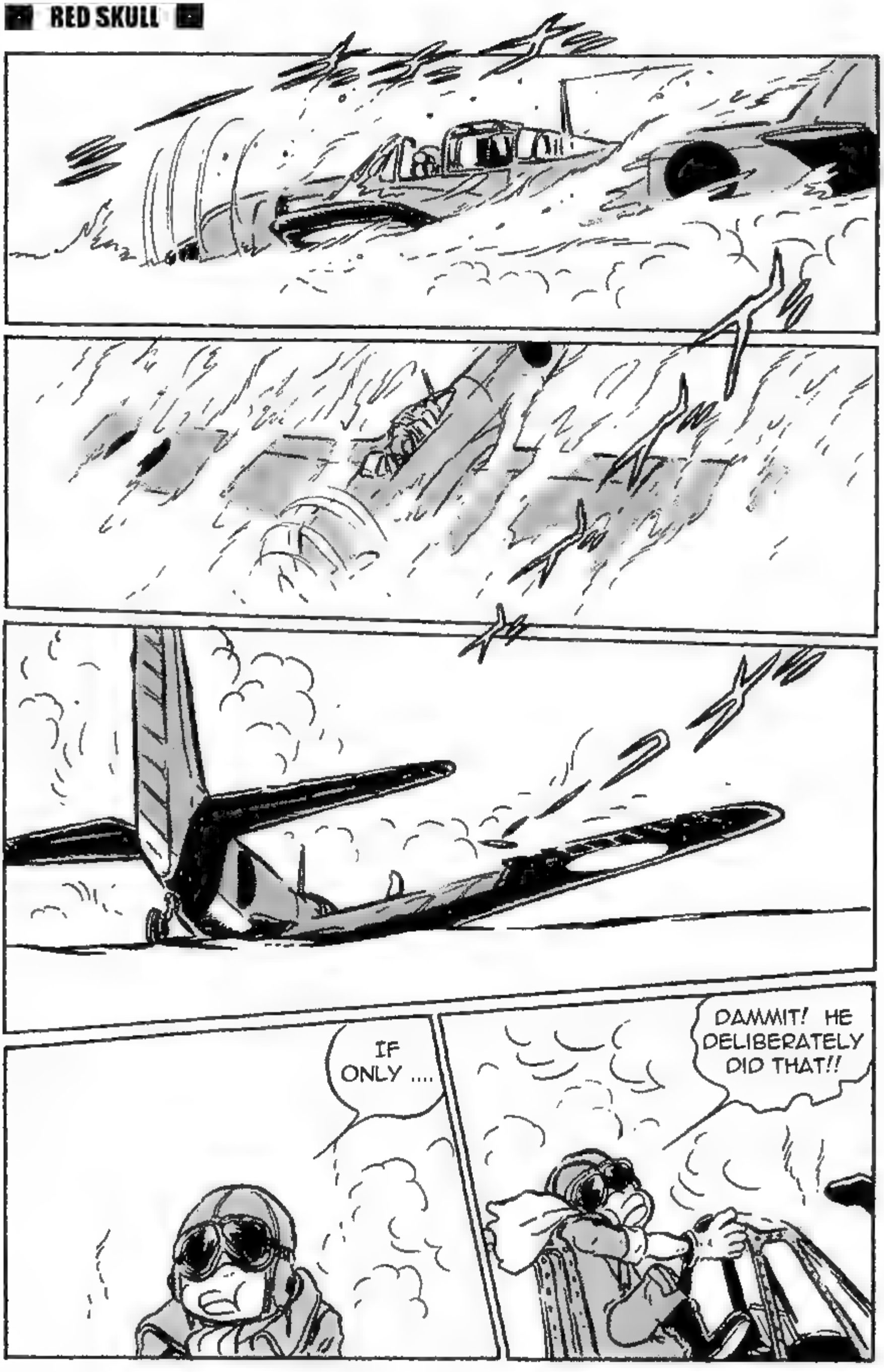


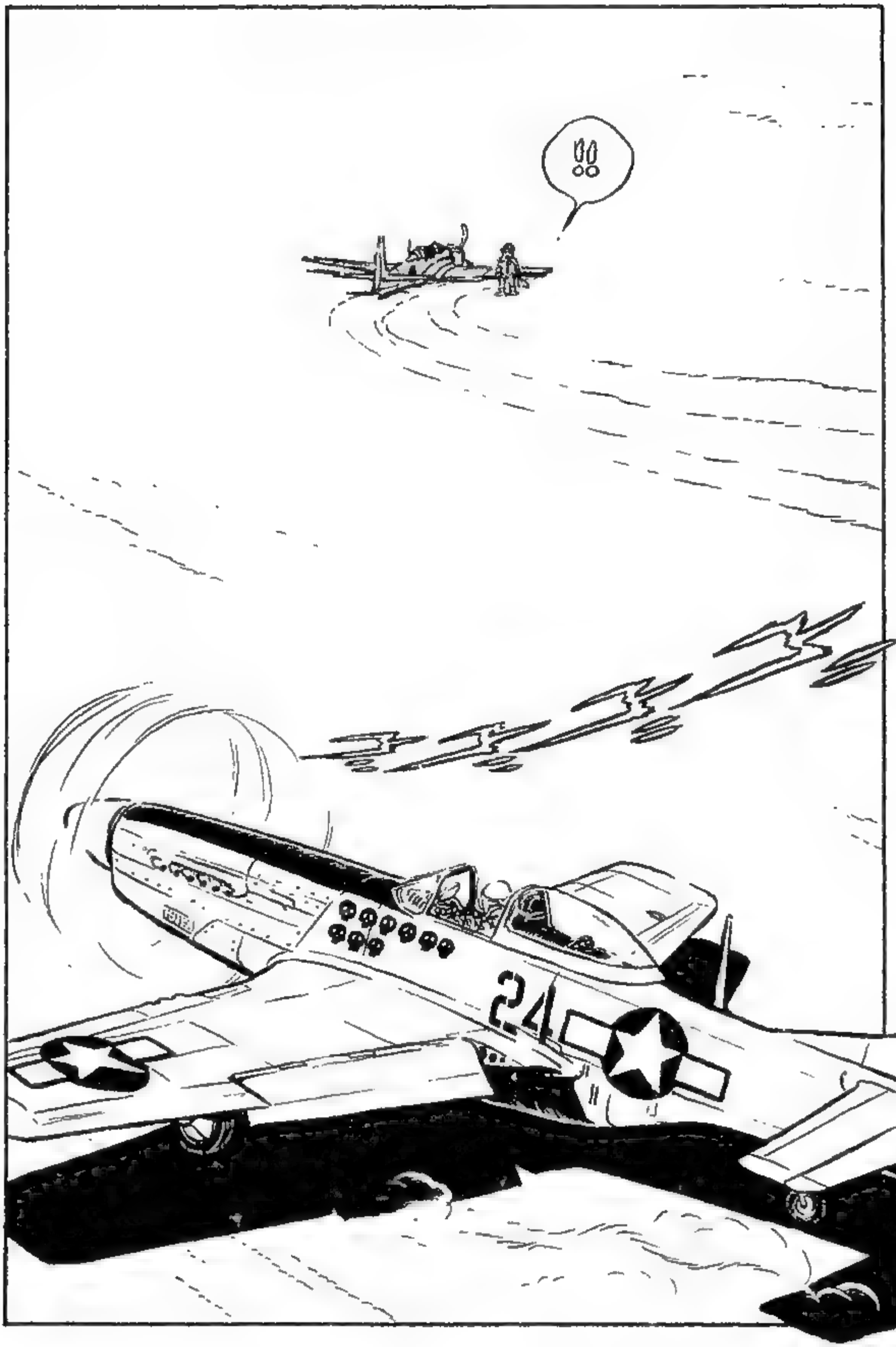

DAMN YOU BASTARD, I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF THAT!!!

MY TURN NOW!!!
WHAT?!?! MY GUNS WON'T FIRE!!!
THEY MUST BE JAMMED OR SOMTHING! DAMN!!!

NOZAKI! COME DOWN AT ONCE!! THE WAR'S OVER!!! IT'S AN IMPERIAL DECREE!!!!
ANYONE THERE?! IT'S ME, NOZAKI! COME IN!
AH, THE RADIO'S WORKING AGAIN!
SHIT. IF IT WASN'T FOR MY GUNS I'D-A HAD HIM!!
THE WAR'S OVER! IMPERIAL DECREE!! LAND IMMEDIATELY!!!
WHAT?!?

HEY!


IF ONLY ....
DAMMIT! HE DELIBERATELY DID THAT!!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24

YOU! I NEED RED PAINT AND A BRUSH!

WHAT ELSE CAN GO WRONG?

I'M SORRY, SIR.

WHAT THE FUCK!!! WHY DIDN'T ANYONE TELL ME?!?

WHAT?!?! YOU'RE SAYING THE WAR ENDED A FUCKING WEEK AGO?!?!

YES IT IS, NO MATTER WHAT YOU CLAIM.

I AM NOT YOUR KILL! YOU FORCED ME DOWN!! THAT'S NOT A KILL!!!

YOU'RE THE LAST KILL OF THE WAR FOR AN AMERICAN ACE PILOT, FELLA.

I FORCED YOU DOWN, JAP. THAT'S A KILL BY OUR RULES, AND ONE MORE KILL FOR ME.

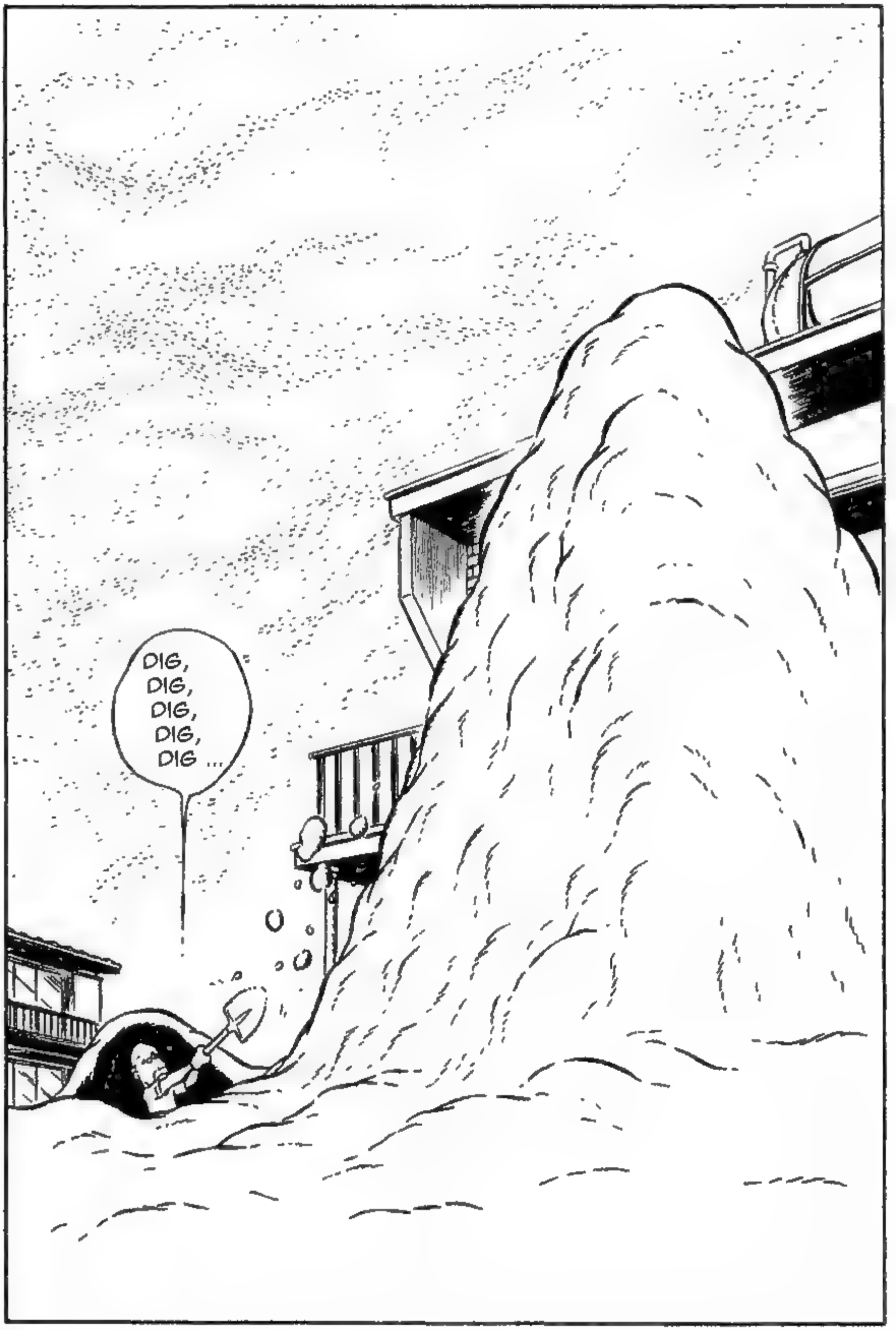
HE MAY BE OLD AND BALD, BUT HE'S STILL AN ASS.

IT WAS NOT A KILL. IT NEVER WAS.

HON, QUIT SULKING AND COME TO BED! I'M SO HORNY FOR MY HERO!

... EVEN IF HE'S GOT TO ALTER THE RECORD TO DO IT.

HE NEVER WILL ADMIT HE WAS MY LAST KILL OF THE WAR ...


DIG,
DIG,
DIG,
DIG,
DIG ...

THAT WAS NOT A KILL, YOU MORON!

HE NEVER WOULD ADMIT DEFEAT.

FORCING SOMEONE DOWN INTO A CRASH LANDING IS NOT A FUCKING KILL!!!

NOT BY ANYONE'S FUCKING RULES!

I DON'T KNOW ANY SUCH THING, LITTLE FELLA.

IT'S A LIE AND YOU KNOW IT IS.

REMOVE THAT SKULL, MISTER!

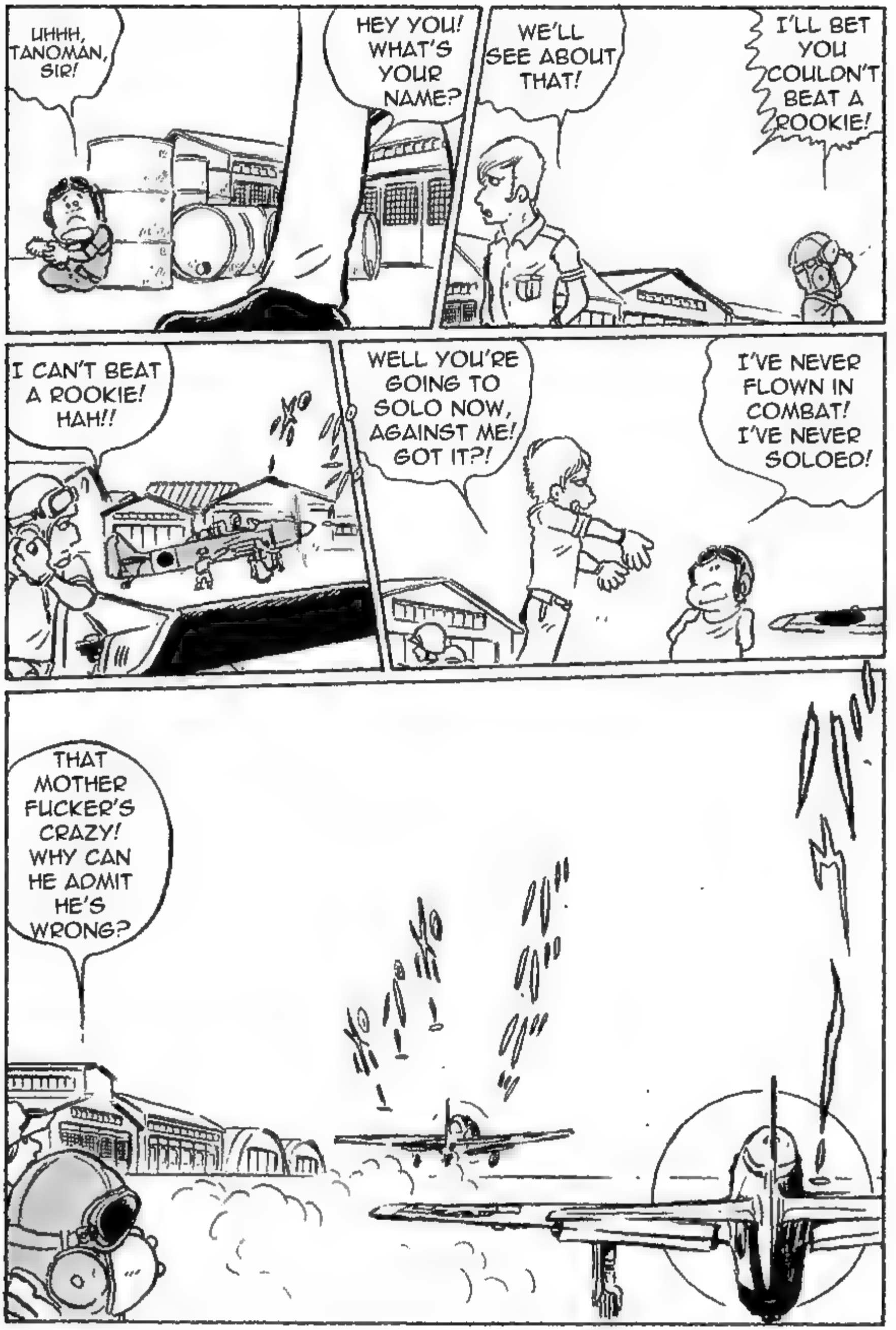
YOUR OPINION DOESN'T COUNT.

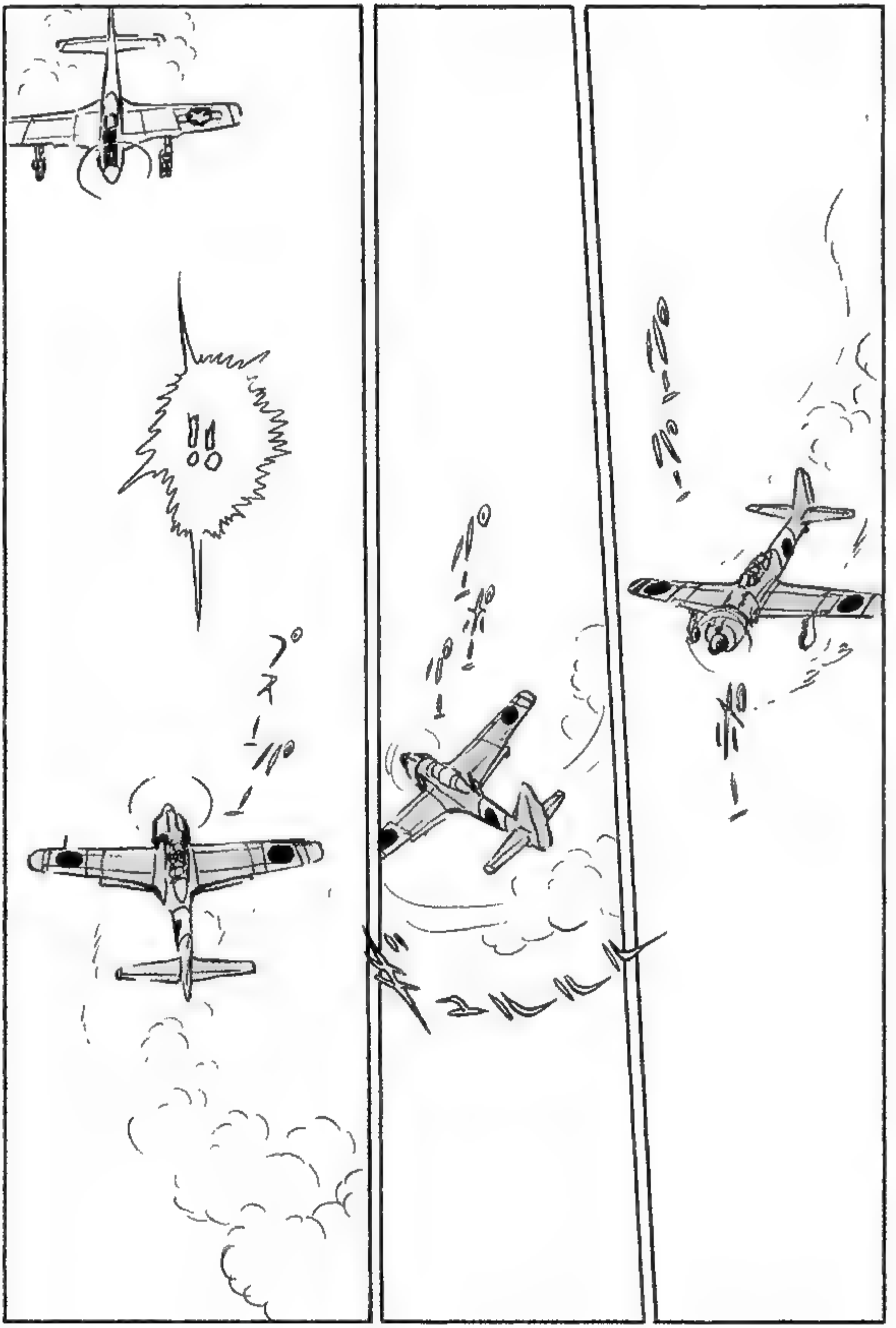
I'LL DO NO SUCH THING!!

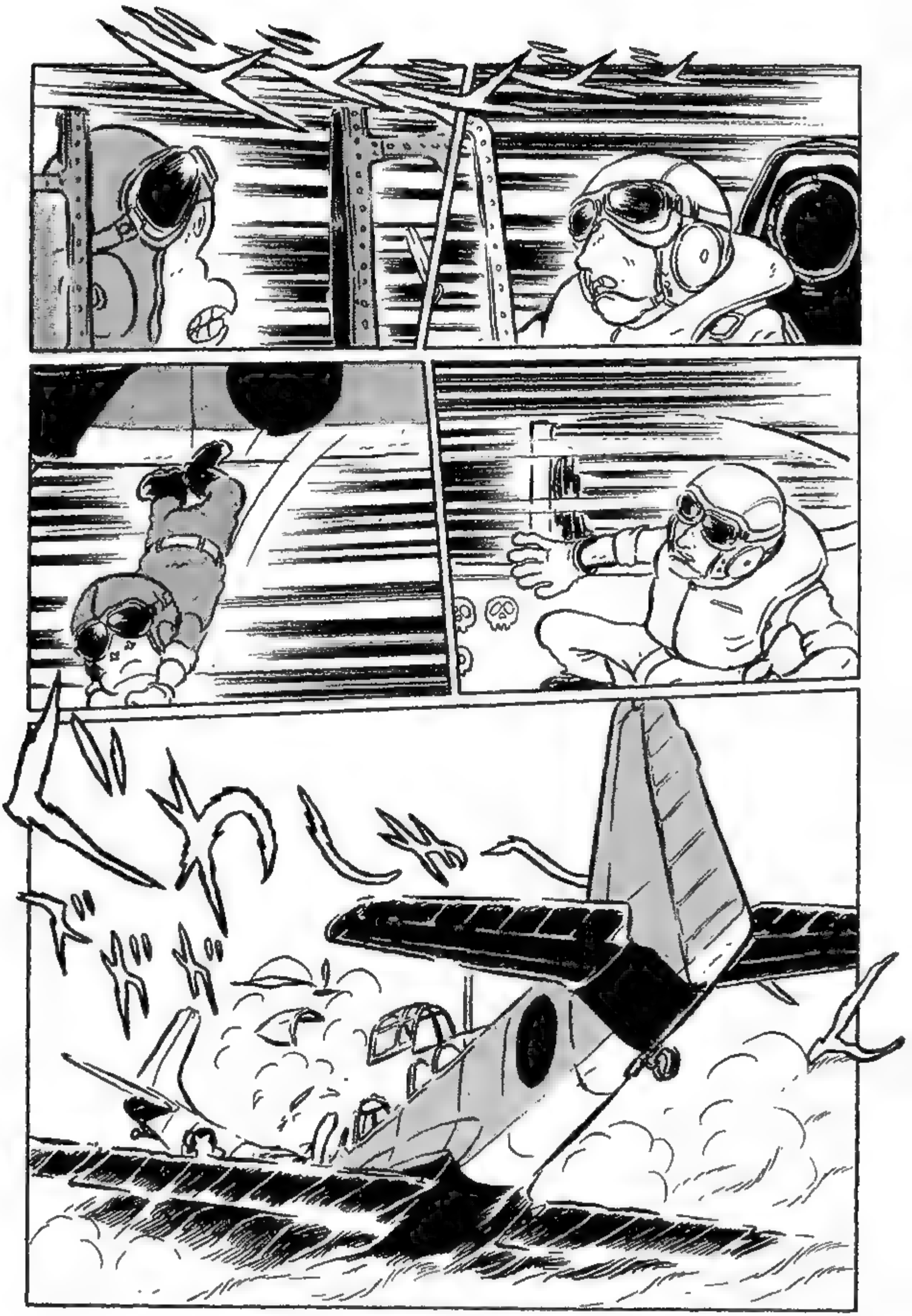
I DON'T KNOW WHETHER OR NOT YOU REALLY EARNED ALL OF THESE OTHERS OR THEY'RE LIES TOO, BUT THAT LAST ONE IS DEFINITELY A LIE AND YOU WILL REMOVE IT, MISTER!

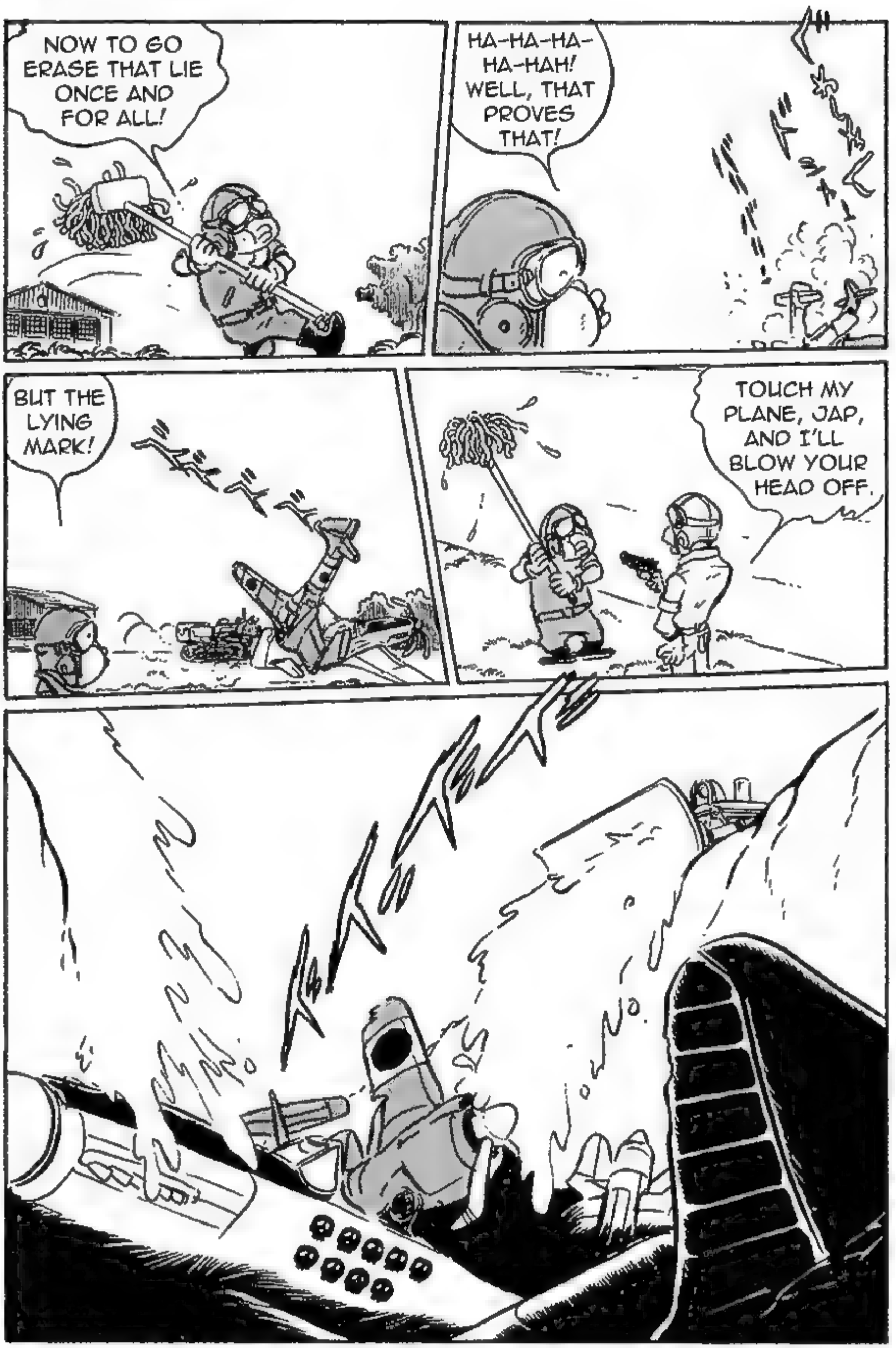
NO!

REMOVE IT.

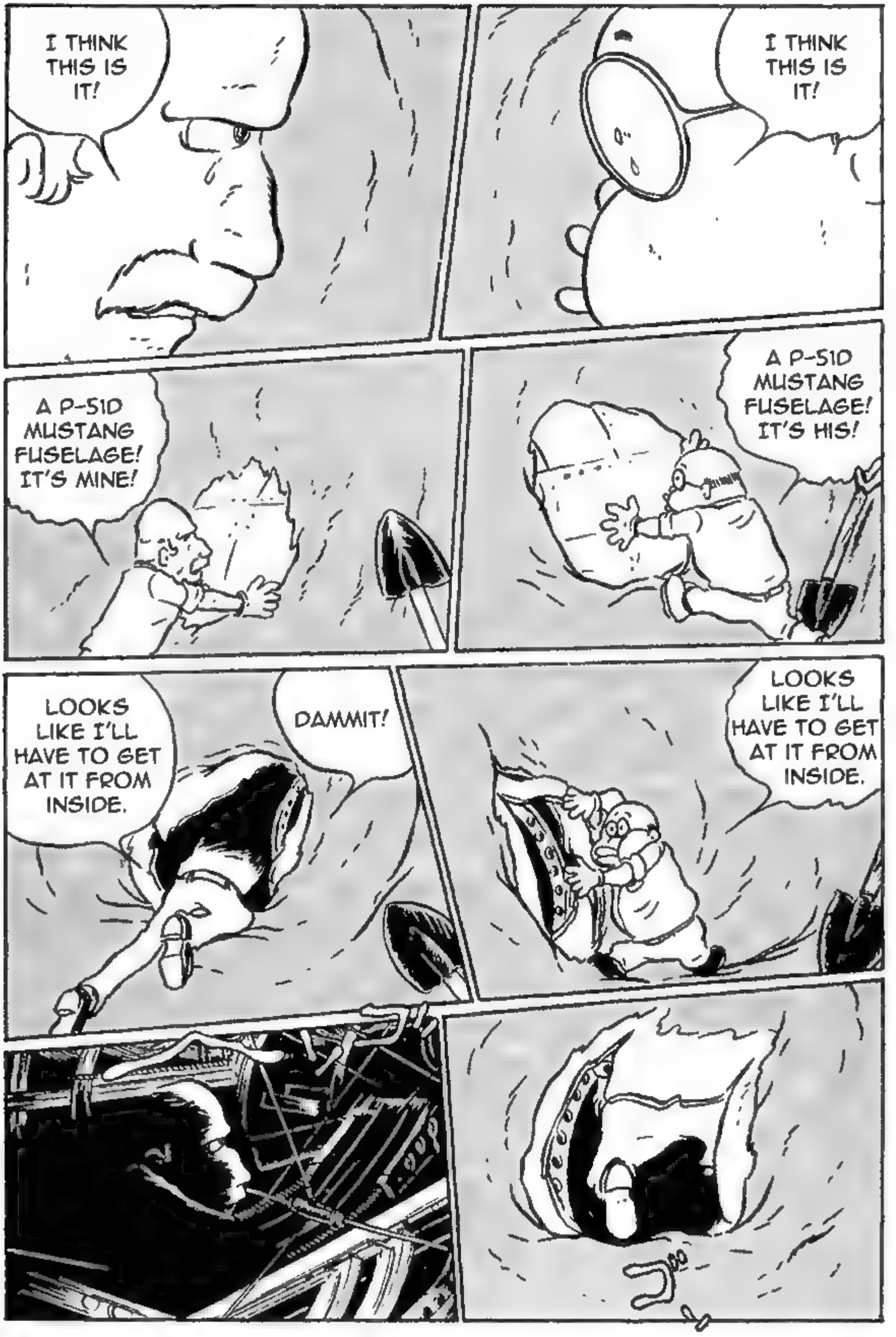

UHHH, TANOMAN, SIR!
HEY YOU! WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT!
I'LL BET YOU COULDN'T BEAT A ROOKIE!
I CAN'T BEAT A ROOKIE! HAH!!
WELL YOU'RE GOING TO SOLO NOW, AGAINST ME! GOT IT?!
I'VE NEVER FLOWN IN COMBAT! I'VE NEVER SOLOED!
THAT MOTHER FUCKER'S CRAZY! WHY CAN HE ADMIT HE'S WRONG?

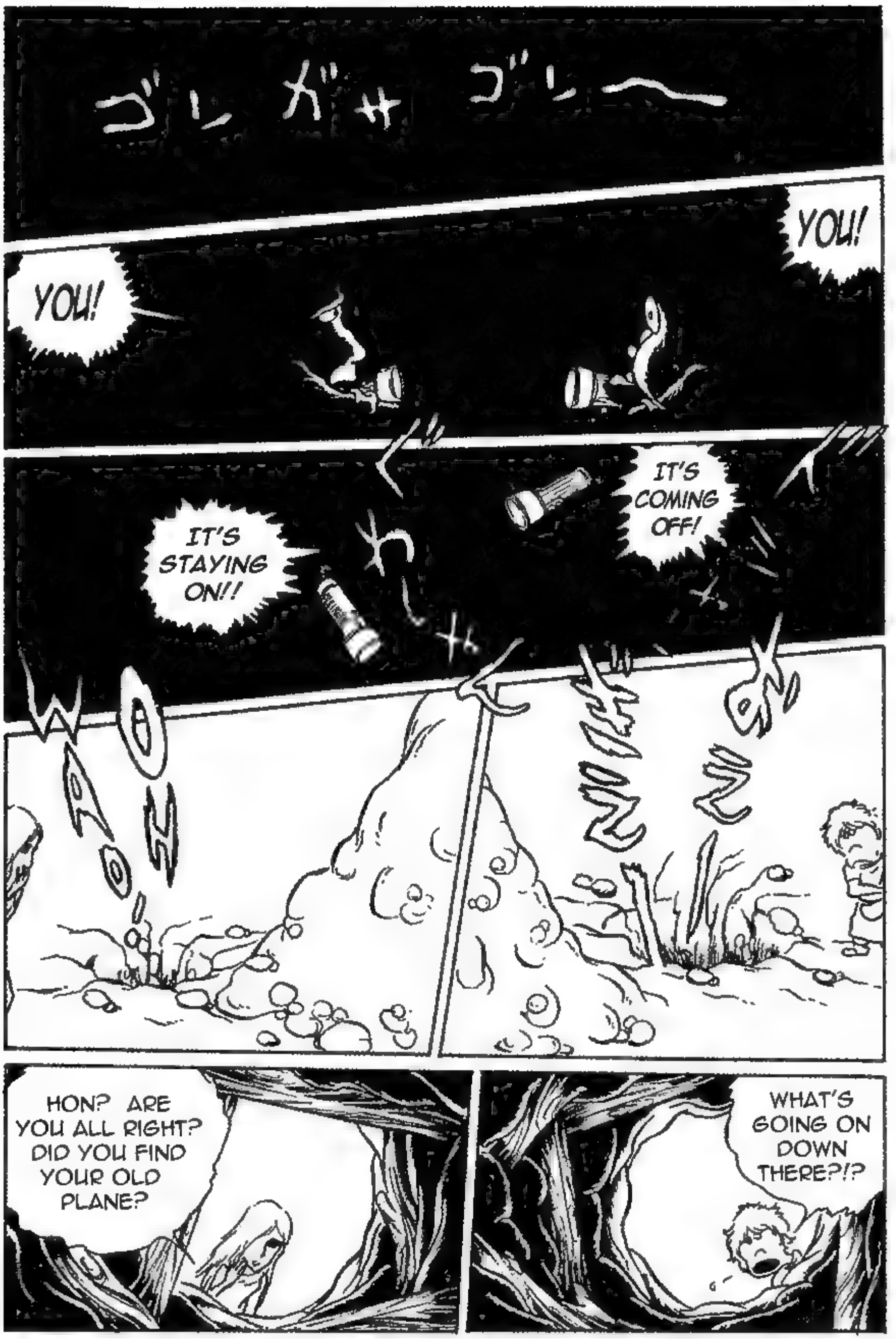


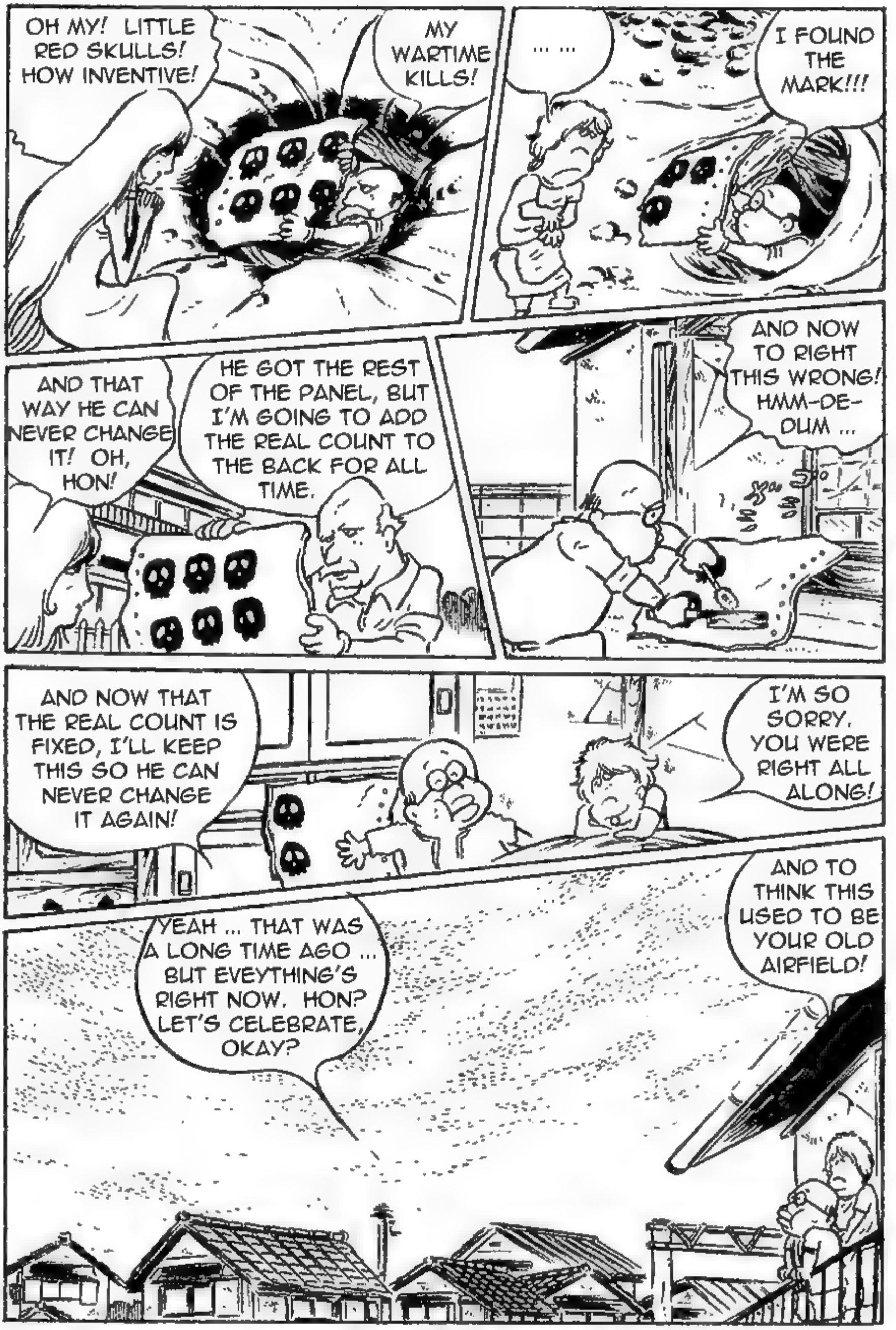


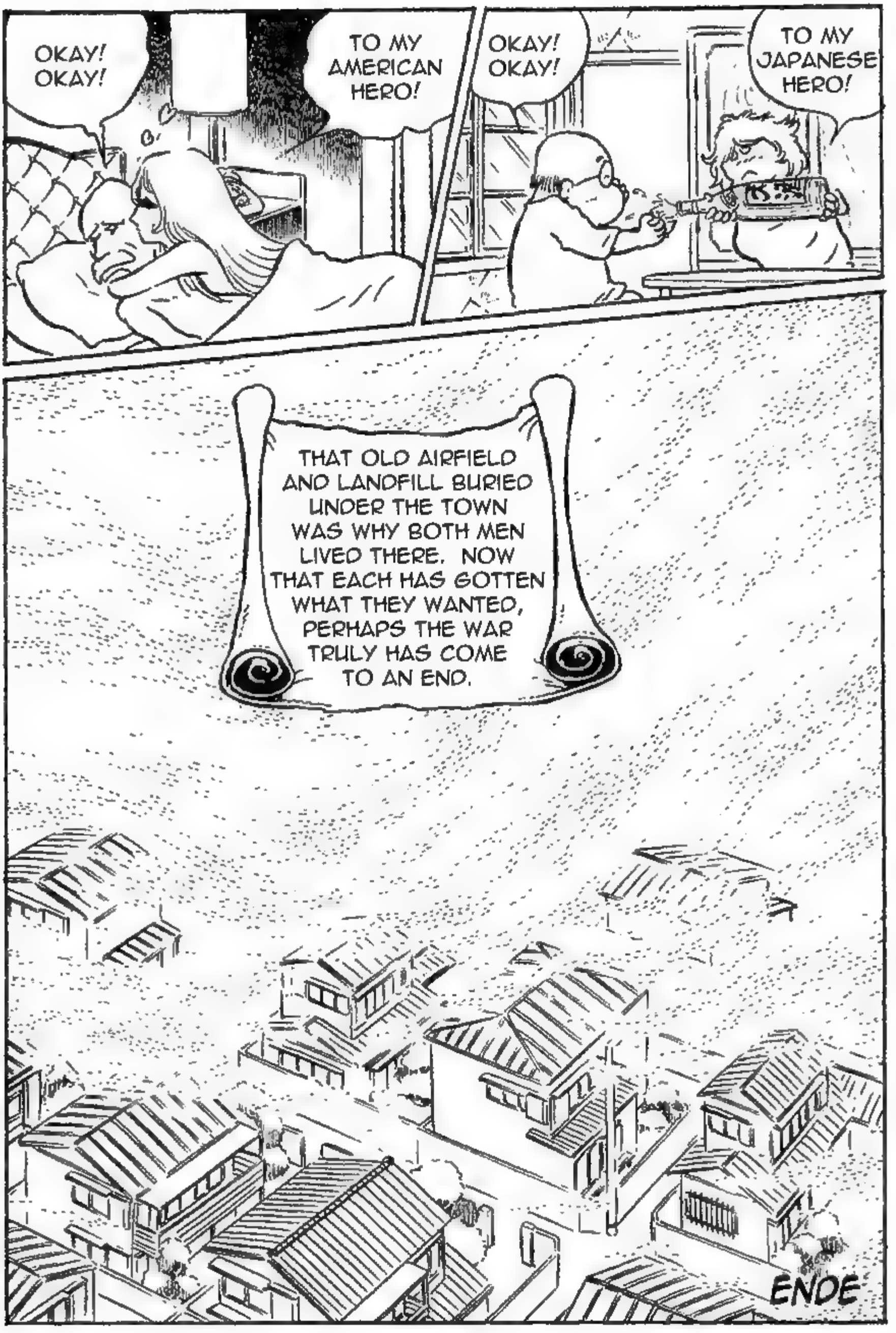

NOW TO GO ERASE THAT LIE ONCE AND FOR ALL!
HA-HA-HA-HA-HAH! WELL, THAT PROVES THAT!
BUT THE LYING MARK!
TOUCH MY PLANE, JAP, AND I'LL BLOW YOUR HEAD OFF.
NO.

IT'S BEEN, WHAT? DECADES? THOSE OLD PLANES IN THAT LANDFILL UNDER US HAVE RUSTED AWAY BY NOW AND THAT MARK WITH THEM!
NOW I CAN NEVER ERASE IT!
I KNOW WHAT HE'S UP TO AND I WON'T LET HIM DO IT!
I KNOW WHAT HE'S UP TO AND I WON'T LET HIM DO IT!
I'VE GOT TO REACH IT BEFORE HE DOES!
I'VE GOT TO REACH IT BEFORE HE DOES!


I THINK THIS IS IT!
I THINK THIS IS IT!
A P-51D MUSTANG FUSELAGE! IT'S MINE!
A P-51D MUSTANG FUSELAGE! IT'S HIS!
LOOKS LIKE I'LL HAVE TO GET AT IT FROM INSIDE.
DAMMIT!
LOOKS LIKE I'LL HAVE TO GET AT IT FROM INSIDE.


YOU!
YOU!
IT'S COMING OFF!
IT'S STAYING ON!!
WHOA!
HON? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? DID YOU FIND YOUR OLD PLANE?
WHAT'S GOING ON DOWN THERE?!?


OH MY! LITTLE RED SKULLS! HOW INVENTIVE!
MY WARTIME KILLS!
... ...
I FOUND THE MARK!!!
AND THAT WAY HE CAN NEVER CHANGE IT! OH, HON!
HE GOT THE REST OF THE PANEL, BUT I'M GOING TO ADD THE REAL COUNT TO THE BACK FOR ALL TIME.
AND NOW TO RIGHT THIS WRONG! HMM-DE-DUM ...
AND NOW THAT THE REAL COUNT IS FIXED, I'LL KEEP THIS SO HE CAN NEVER CHANGE IT AGAIN!
I'M SO SORRY. YOU WERE RIGHT ALL ALONG!
AND TO THINK THIS USED TO BE YOUR OLD AIRFIELD!
YEAH ... THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO ... BUT EVEYTHING'S RIGHT NOW. HON? LET'S CELEBRATE, OKAY?


OKAY! OKAY!
TO MY AMERICAN HERO!
OKAY! OKAY!
TO MY JAPANESE HERO!
THAT OLD AIRFIELD AND LANDFILL BURIED UNDER THE TOWN WAS WHY BOTH MEN LIVED THERE. NOW THAT EACH HAS GOTTEN WHAT THEY WANTED, PERHAPS THE WAR TRULY HAS COME TO AN END.
ENDE

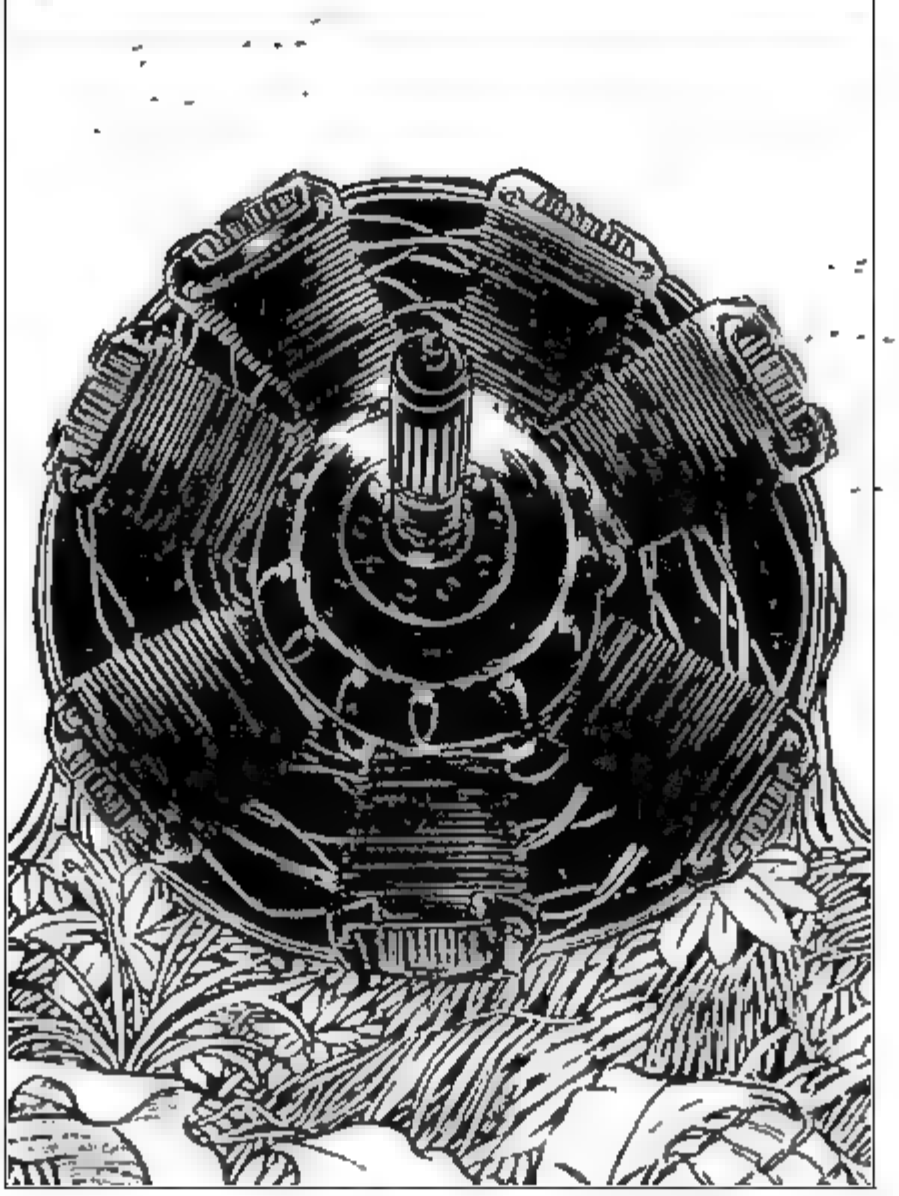
(Published in Big Comic Original, July 5, 1978 issue)

MANDELISMS

And so ends yet another wonderful little comedy piece by Matsumoto, one that is more or less a study in mutual obsession but eschews the more common Moby Dick kind of approach for a more humorous turn We can laugh at the virtual pissing contest our two protagonists get into over what really happened to them both after the end of the war, especially those of us who have literally "been there, done that" in our own lives in the real world I think you'll also agree with me in our various experiences that the old saying of "time heals all wounds" does not apply to the compulsively obsessed, as Matsumoto so wonderfully illustrates in his tale Talk among yourselves

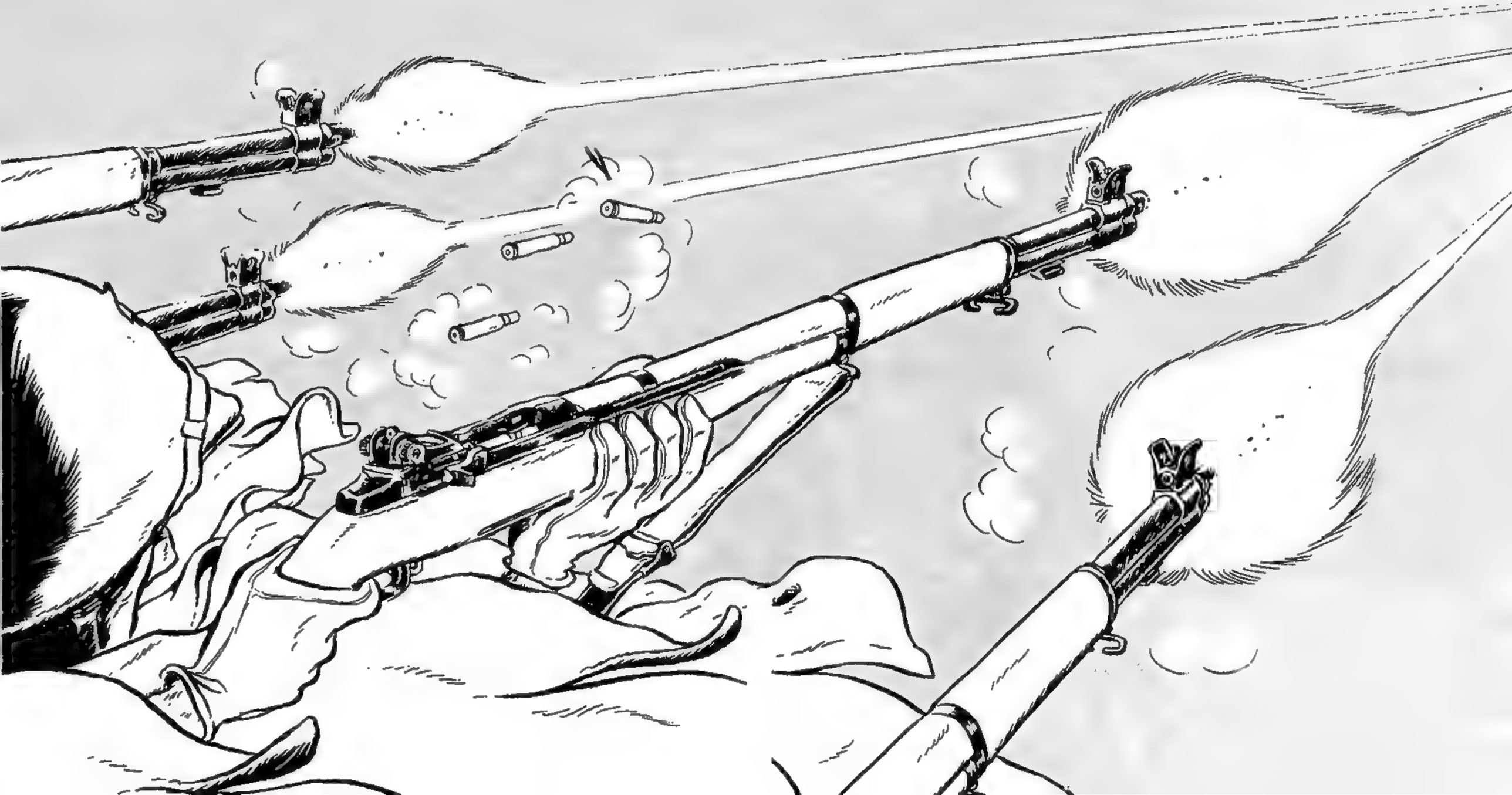
TALES FROM THE COCKPIT

THE VAMPIRE'S BOUQUET



DOUBLE TAKES AREN'T ALWAYS FUNNY. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN YOU REALIZE SOMETHING JUST HAPPENED, YOU DO A DOUBLE TAKE, AND ARE THEN OVERCOME WITH TERRIFYING FEAR. THERE'S NO WAY TO IGNORE WHAT YOU JUST SAW OR JUST HAPPENED. ALL YOU CAN DO IS TREMBLE.
IT'S A YOUNG MAN WITH A DOG. THE DOG IS OVER BY THAT TREE. I ALSO SEE A JAP HELMET.

THE VAMPIRE'S BOUQUET



NO KIDDING.
SHIMADA AND OOI ARE DEAD.
I'M STILL SHAKING!
OH MAN! THAT WAS CRAZY!
MAN, BUT THAT WAS CLOSE! THEY HAD GRENADES TOO! IF WE HADN'T BEEN ABLE TO FIRE OURS FIRST WE'D BE THE ONES DOWN THERE!
THREE, LOOKS LIKE. THEY GOT BLOWN OFF THE CLIFF WHEN OUR GRENADES EXPLODED.
HOW MANY WERE THERE?

AND WE GOT HEAVIER STUFF TO CARRY.

WITHOUT GRENADES IT'S JUST A TUBE WITH A TRIGGER.

WE'RE OUT OF GRENADES. WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS NOW?

AS CLOSE AS WE ARE TO THE FRONT LINES? YEAH. THAT'S THREE TIMES NOW.

DO YOU THINK WE'LL GET AMBUSHED AGAIN?

THIS WHOLE THING IS COMPETELY MEANINGLESS IF YOU ASK ME. I KNOW, NONE OF YOU DID.

THE BAD THING IS THAT FOR EVERY ENGINE WE CAN FIND THAT'S SALVAGEABLE AND BRING BACK, THE AMERICANS HAVE ALREADY MADE THREE OR FOUR OF THEIRS.

WELL, GIVEN OUR SITUATION THIS LATE IN THE WAR, IT'S NOT LIKE WE'VE GOT MUCH OF A CHOICE.

THIS IS MY TENTH BATTLE SALVAGE TRIP. I DON'T LIKE IT ANY MORE THAN I DID THE FIRST.

YEAH. THE WHOLE THING IS A REAL PAIN IN THE ASS.

LIKE ALL THE OTHERS WE'RE FIGHTING A LOSING BATTLE.

TRUE, BUT THERE ARE EVEN JAPANESE WOMEN OUT THERE THAT NEED 'EM.

"BRA." THAT'S A FOREIGN CONCEPT.

DID YOU KNOW THAT BRAS ARE JUST BREAST BANDS FOR WOMEN?

I WEAR AS LITTLE AS I CAN ON THESE TRIPS. I DON'T EVEN HAVE ON ANY UNDERWEAR.

THEY DID. WELL, AND MORE TO BOOT.

CAN YOU DIE FROM A NOSE BLEED?

ME TOO. YOU'RE MAKING ME THINK OF TAKING A GIRL'S BRA OFF ....

YOU'RE GIVING ME A NOSE BLEED.

HEY! DO YOU SEE THAT?

YOU KNOW THE DRILL, GUYS LET'S CHECK OUT THE ENGINE
UPSH! THERE'S A BODY INSIDE

I WONDER HOW LONG HE'S ....

DOES THAT ANSWER YOUR QUESTION?

AT LEAST IT'S OVER FOR HIM. ALL RIGHT, HERE WE GO.

IT LOOKS SALVAGEABLE. LET'S GET IT DISMOUNTED AND READY.

I WISH WE HAD A FUCKIN' TRUCK, MUCH LESS A ROAD TO DRIVE ON! IT'D SAVE HAVING TO DRAG THIS THING ALL THE WAY BACK!

THERE! ALL IN ALL IN PRETTY GOOD SHAPE! NOW TO GET IT BACK.

FIVE KILOMETERS AND DRAGGING THIS FUCKIN' ENGINE THE WHOLE WAY! THAT'S NOT FAIR!

DON'T FORGET ABOUT THE TRUCK WAITING FOR US FIVE KILOMETERS AWAY.

ALL RIGHT.

WELL, WE AIN'T GOT A TRUCK AND WE AIN'T GOT A ROAD SO QUIT YOUR WHINING AND HELP GET THIS READY TO MOVE.

TELL ME ABOUT IT, YAMAKOSHI. THIS IS THE ELEVENTH TIME I'VE DRAGGED ONE OF THESE THROUGH THE JUNGLE.

FIVE KILOMETERS WOULD BE EASY FOR AN ARMY CARGO TRUCK, IF ONLY IT COULD GET TO US.

YOU KNOW, WHEN I SIGNED UP I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO BE A SOLDIER AND FIGHT BATTLES. NOW I'M A JUNKMAN SCRABBLING FOR SALVAGE AND MY HANDS ARE COVERED IN BLISTERS.

I'M SO TIRED AND HURT SO MUCH I CAN HARDLY MOVE!

SHIT, BUT THIS IS HEAVY! AND IT'S GETTING DARK TOO!

DO YOU WANT ME TO GO DOWN THE COMPANY HONOR ROLL FOR YOU?

DON'T FORGET WE'VE HAD OUR SHARE OF FIGHTS AND LOSSES.

IT'S A TRUCK! HEY GUYS!!

IT'S A ...

HEY! A CASE OF GRENADES!

SHIT.

UH-OH.

ニオイだ

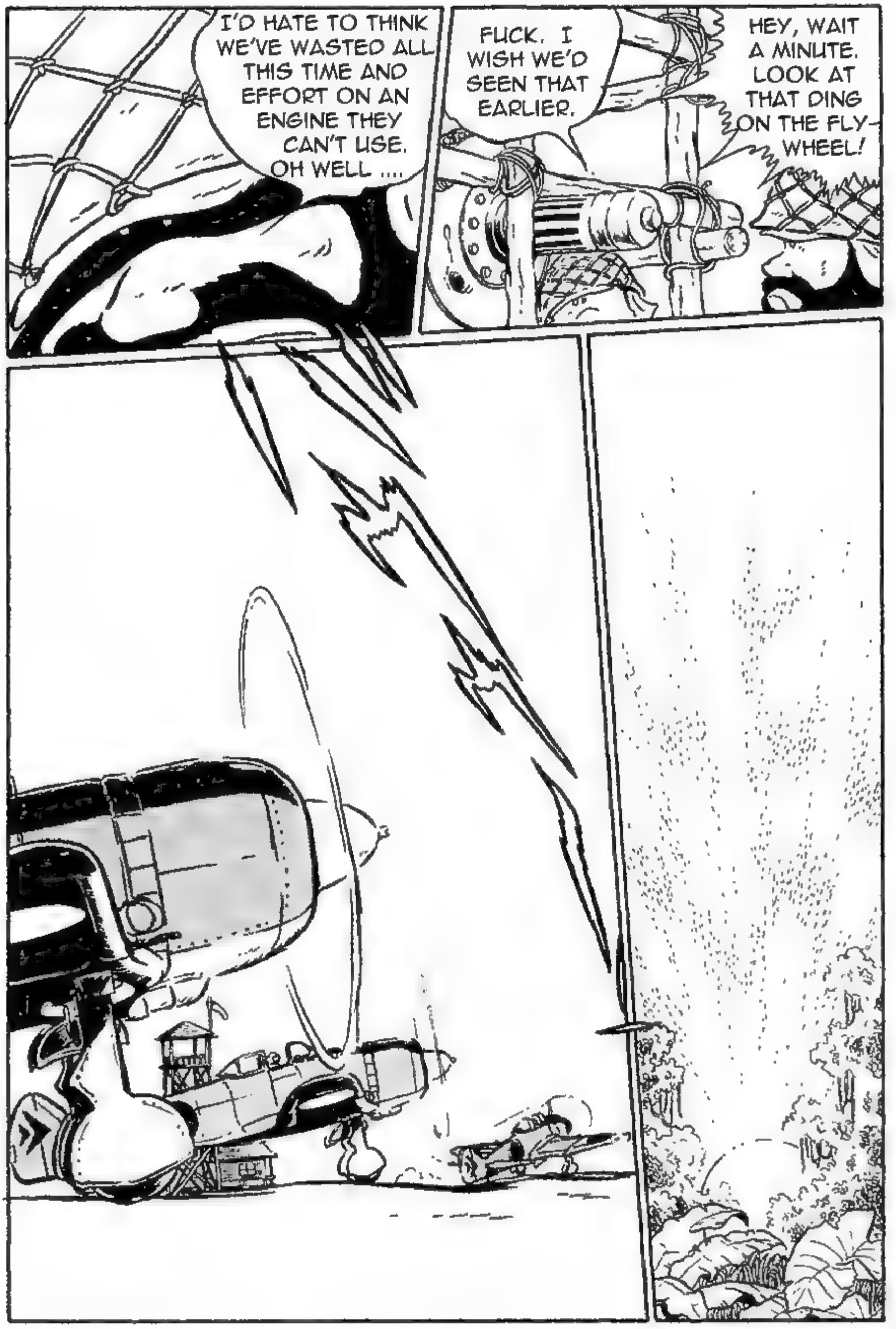
TAKE COVER!!

EAT THIS!!!

YEAH, BUT THEY GOT KUMADA! NOT A FAIR TRADE!

WE'RE LUCKY YOU FOUND THOSE.

PULL BACK!


I'D HATE TO THINK WE'VE WASTED ALL THIS TIME AND EFFORT ON AN ENGINE THEY CAN'T USE. OH WELL ....
FUCK. I WISH WE'D SEEN THAT EARLIER.
HEY, WAIT A MINUTE. LOOK AT THAT DING ON THE FLY-WHEEL!

DRINK UP, GUYS! COMPLEMENTS OF SQUAD LEADER TAICHIYO!

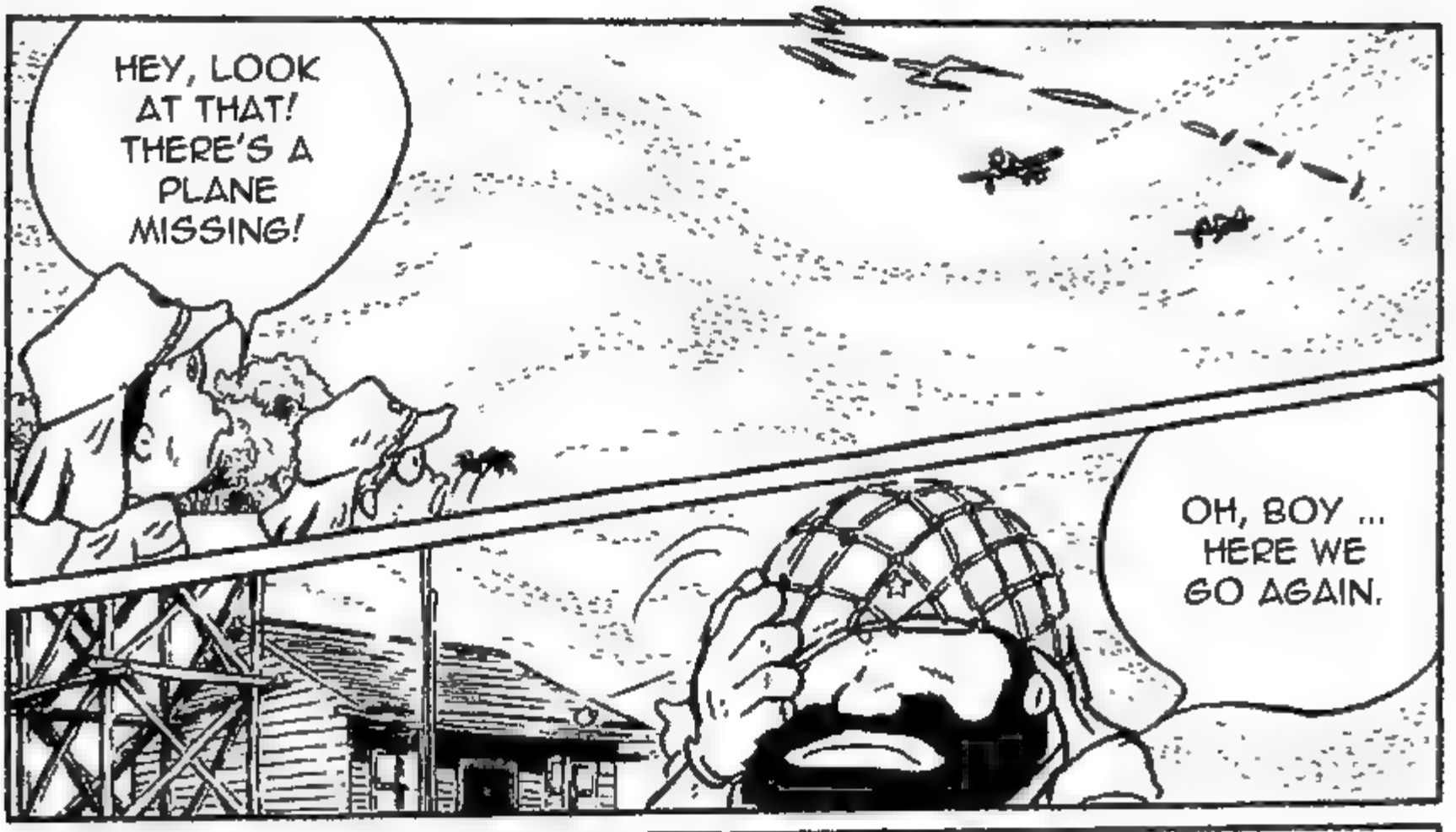
HIC CHEERS! *HIC*

... ANH SHO WE WIV TO SCHRAP ANUDDER DAYE!

HEY, DID YOU HEAR! THEY WERE ABLE TO USE ...

... THAT ENGINE IN SPITE OF THAT DING.

AT LEAST THAT'S ONE MORE PLANE IN THE AIR ... ONLY ONE ....


HEY, LOOK AT THAT! THERE'S A PLANE MISSING!
OH, BOY ... HERE WE GO AGAIN.
SO MUCH FOR THE PARTY.
I KNOW.
A JUNGLE IS A JUNGLE, WHETHER BIG OR SMALL!
SETTLE DOWN. IT'S NOT THAT FAR THIS TIME.
I'M STARTING TO HATE JUNGLES.

DUCK!!!

YOU SAID IT.

WE'RE ALWAYS GETTING THE SHITTY JOBS. YOU'D THINK THEY'D GIVE US SOMETHING NICE AND EASY FOR ONCE.

BOMB? WHAT KIND OF BOMB IS IT? I THINK I'VE GOT AN IDEA.

PLEASE DON'T SHOOT THIS BOMB, PRETTY PLEASE!

HOLY FUCKING SHIT! THESE GUYS ARE FUCKIN' SERIOUS THIS TIME, AND THEY GOT SERIOUS FIREPOWER!

EES KRISMASU!*

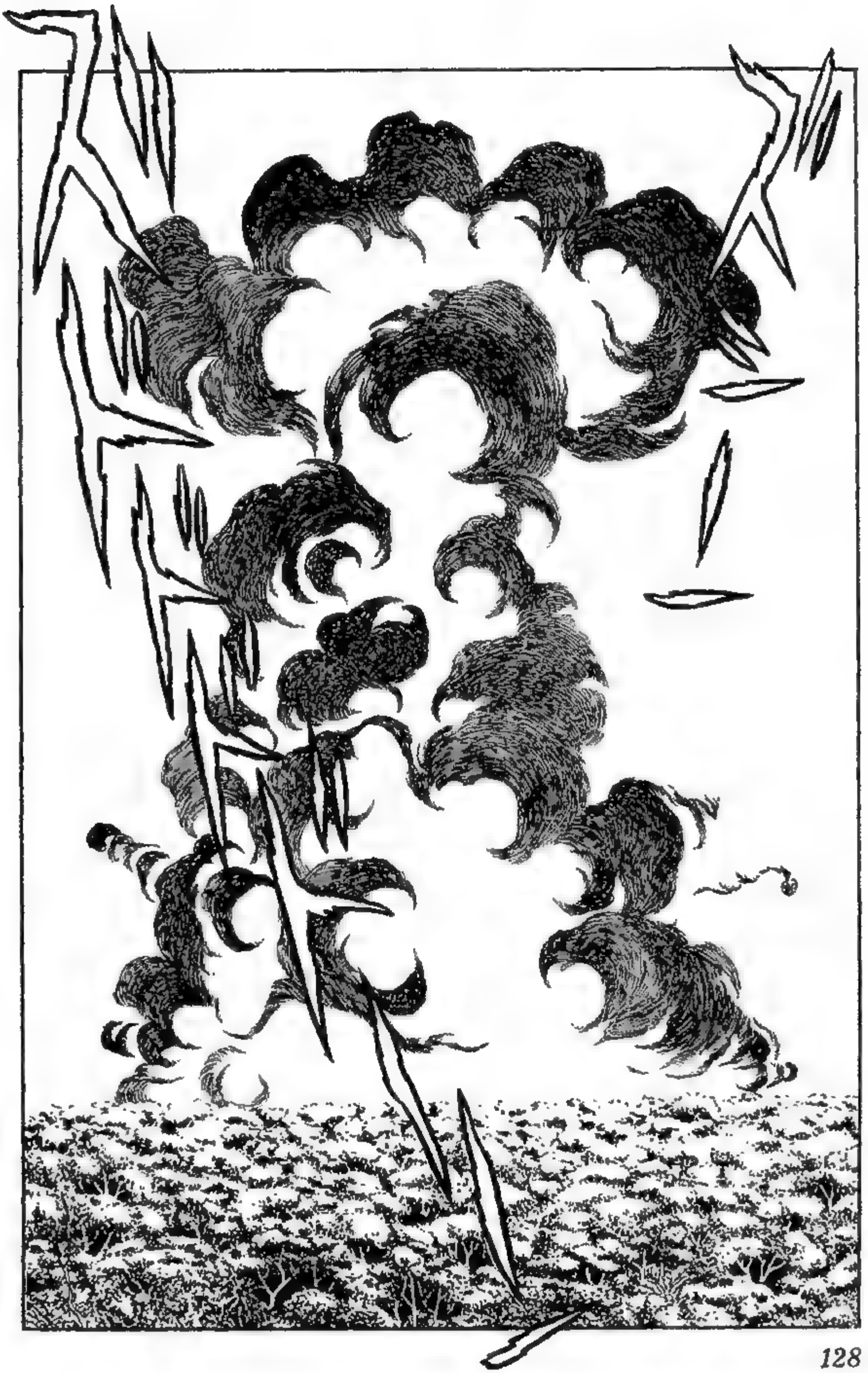
OH SHIT!!!

WHAT?!!

LET'S SET THE FUSE AND ROLL IT AT 'EM.

JUST A NORMAL 250KG ARMOR PIERCING BOMB. WHY? WHAT DID YOU HAVE IN MIND?

(*) EES KRISMASU - NATIVE JAPANESE ATTEMPT TO SAY "IT'S CHRISTMAS!"



AAHHH! YOU GOT THE ENGINE! GREAT WORK GUYS, GREAT WORK!!

EXCUSE ME?

IS THERE SOMETHING WRONG WITH YOUR HEARING, MISTER? AND THAT OF YOUR MEN?

I'LL EXPLAIN LATER, SIR. OH, WE ALSO "SALVAGED" THESE!

THESE AMERICANS ARE WHAT'S LEFT OF A BUNCH WHO TRIED AND FAILED TO ATTACK US, SIR.

OH! THREE ONCE AGAIN!

BUT ONLY THREE, AND THEY WOULDN'T BE UP THERE BUT FOR US!

I THINK I FINALLY FIGURED IT OUT. JAPAN MAKES GREAT AIRPLANE ENGINES. IT'S THE REST OF THE AIRPLANE THAT'S LOUSY.

ANOTHER SALVAGE JOB?! YES SIR. WE'LL GET RIGHT ON IT, SIR.

WELL, LET'S GET HIM BURIED AND THEN GET THAT ENGINE OUT OF THERE.

DEAD AGAIN, HUH?

I THINK IT'S A WASTE OF EXPLOSIVE TO BLOW UP THE REST OF THE PLANE.

AND LET THE AMERICANS FIND ONE? YOU IDIOT!

PLEASE, SIR! WE'RE DOG TIRED!! ALL WE WANT TO DO IS REST!!!

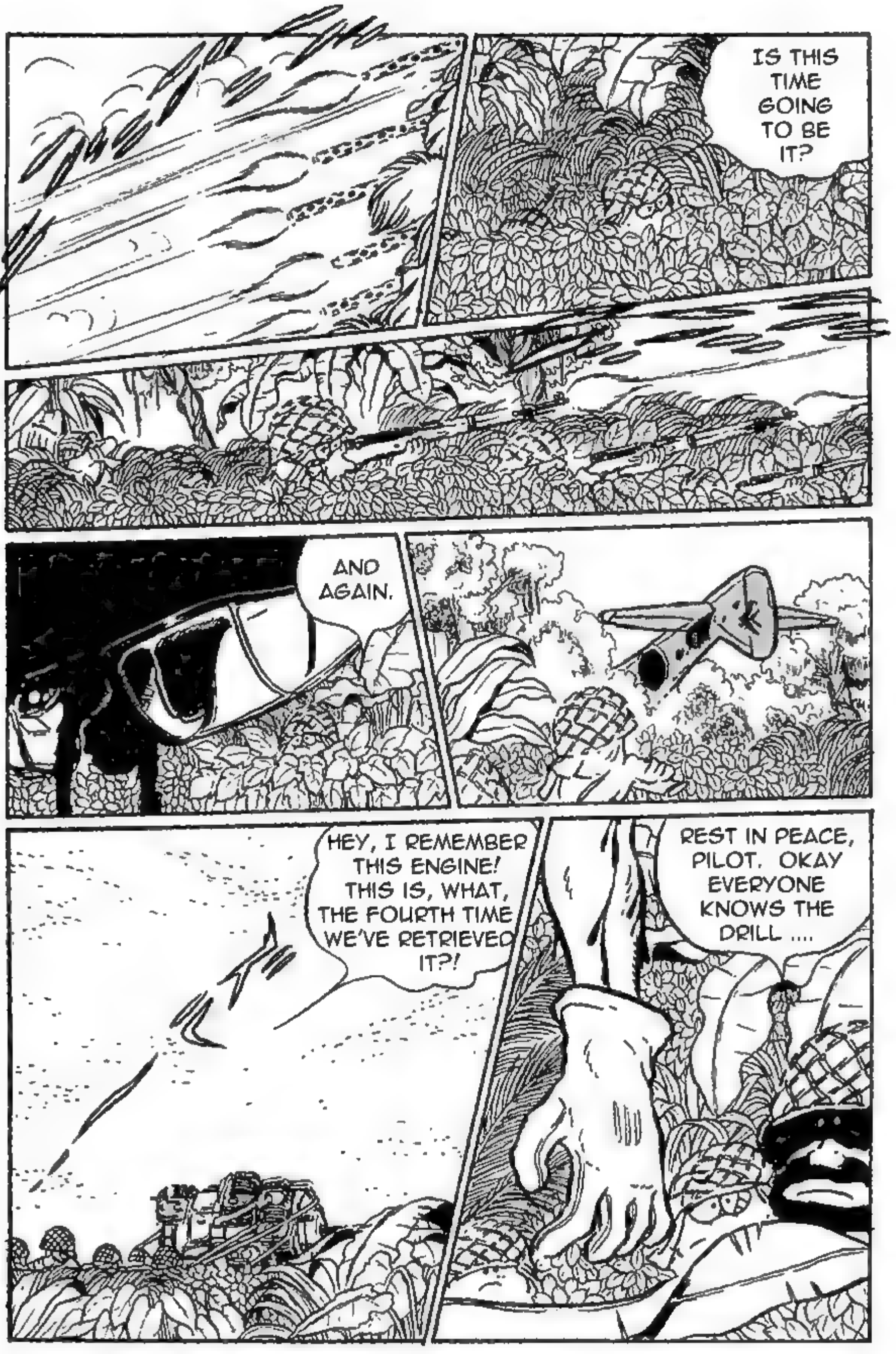
MEN, I'VE GOT A LITTLE JOB--

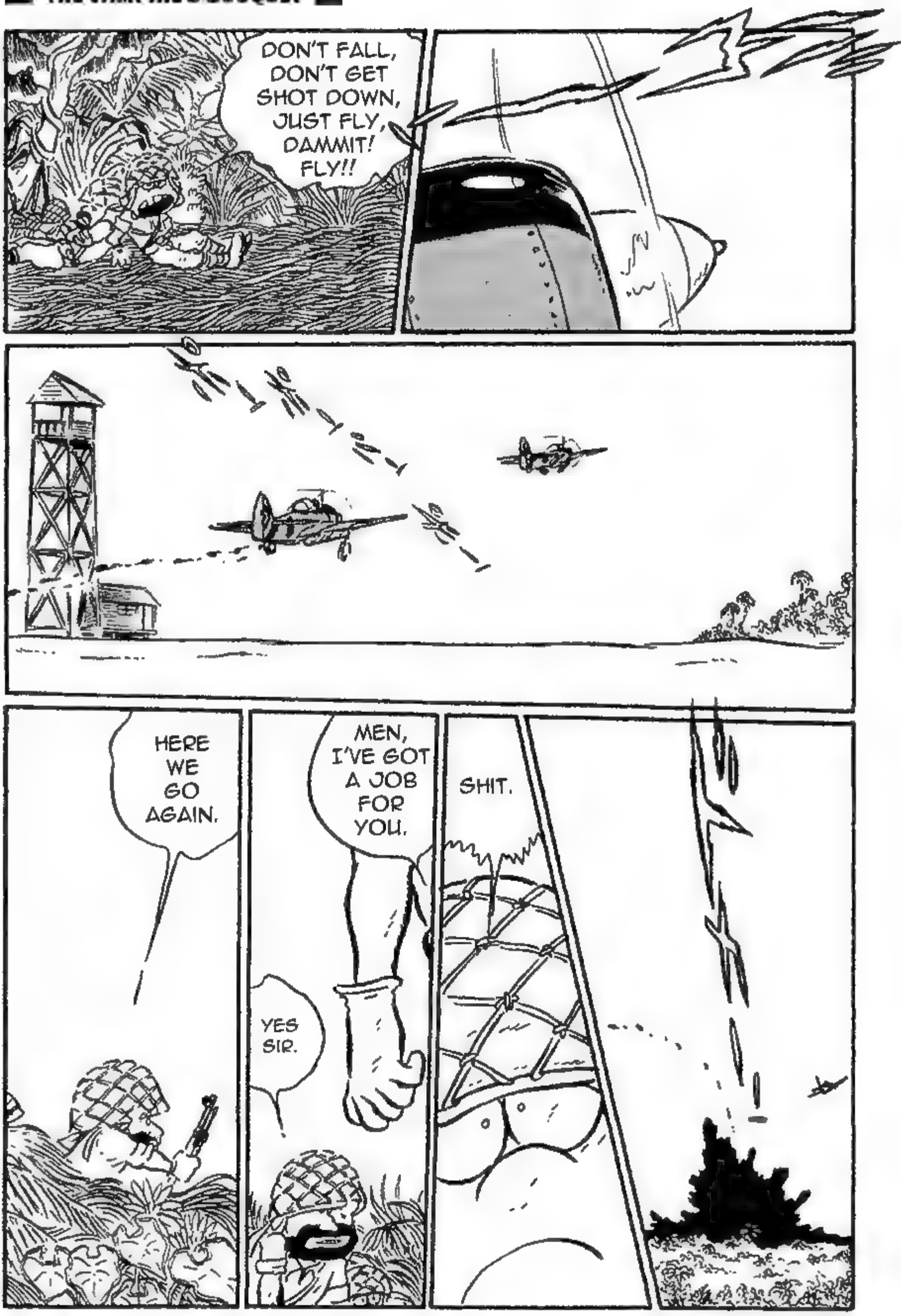
YOU KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS, DON'T YOU?

FUCK!! MOTHER FUCKIN' SHIT!!!

THAT OTHER SHOT OURS DOWN!

UH-OH.


IS THIS TIME GOING TO BE IT?
AND AGAIN.
HEY, I REMEMBER THIS ENGINE! THIS IS, WHAT, THE FOURTH TIME WE'VE RETRIEVED IT?!
REST IN PEACE, PILOT. OKAY EVERYONE KNOWS THE DRILL ....


DON'T FALL, DON'T GET SHOT DOWN, JUST FLY, DAMMIT! FLY!!
HERE WE GO AGAIN.
MEN, I'VE GOT A JOB FOR YOU.
YES SIR.
SHIT.

DAMMIT!
EAT THIS!!!
AND HOW ARE JUST THE TWO OF US GOING TO MANAGE THIS?
THERE IT IS.
KILLED IN THE FIREFIGHT. IT'S JUST YOU AND ME NOW.
AH! YOU MADE IT! WHERE'S--

WE'VE SALVAGED THIS ENGINE BEFORE. SEE THAT LITTLE DING? I SAW THAT A FEW ENGINES BACK.

WHAT? WHAT IS IT?

DON'T SAY THAT!

... IT'S BEEN THE SAME ALL THIS TIME.

I GOT A FUNNY FEELING THAT ...

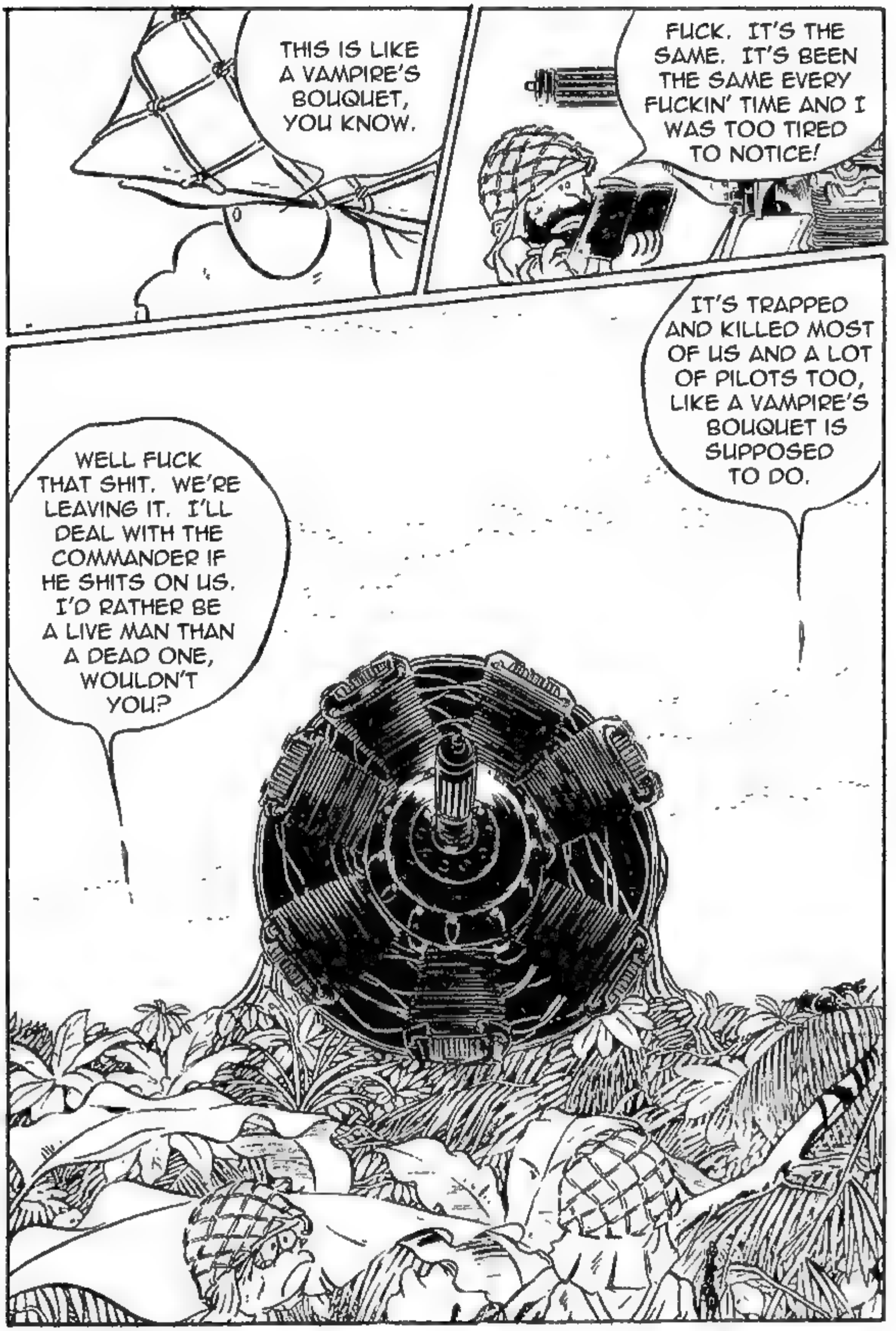
DAMN! YOU'RE RIGHT! I EVEN REMEMBER SAYING SOMETHING ABOUT IT BACK THEN! GOOD CATCH, YAMAKOSHI!

THERE'S ONE WAY TO TELL.

WE'VE BEEN UNDER SO MUCH PRESSURE THAT WE HAVEN'T NOTICED IT BEFORE.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS IF IT IS?!

THE OFFICIAL SALVAGE LOG! YOU WRITE DOWN THE ENGINE NUMBER EVERY TIME WE SALVAGE ONE! CHECK THAT AND SEE!


THIS IS LIKE A VAMPIRE'S BOUQUET, YOU KNOW.
FUCK. IT'S THE SAME. IT'S BEEN THE SAME EVERY FUCKIN' TIME AND I WAS TOO TIRED TO NOTICE!
IT'S TRAPPED AND KILLED MOST OF US AND A LOT OF PILOTS TOO, LIKE A VAMPIRE'S BOUQUET IS SUPPOSED TO DO.
WELL FUCK THAT SHIT. WE'RE LEAVING IT. I'LL DEAL WITH THE COMMANDER IF HE SHITS ON US. I'D RATHER BE A LIVE MAN THAN A DEAD ONE, WOULDN'T YOU?

DO YOU KNOW WHAT VAMPIRES AND CATS HAVE IN COMMON? THEY LIKE TO PLAY WITH THEIR PREY BEFORE THEY KILL IT. SOME SAY THAT VAMPIRE BOUQUETS ARE LIKE THAT TOO. THEY ALSO HAVE THAT FALSE AIR OF MOURNING FOR THE DEAD, WHEN IN TRUTH THEY ARE WAITING FOR THEM.

(Published in B&W Comic Original August 5, 1978 issue)

THE VAMPIRE'S BOUQUET

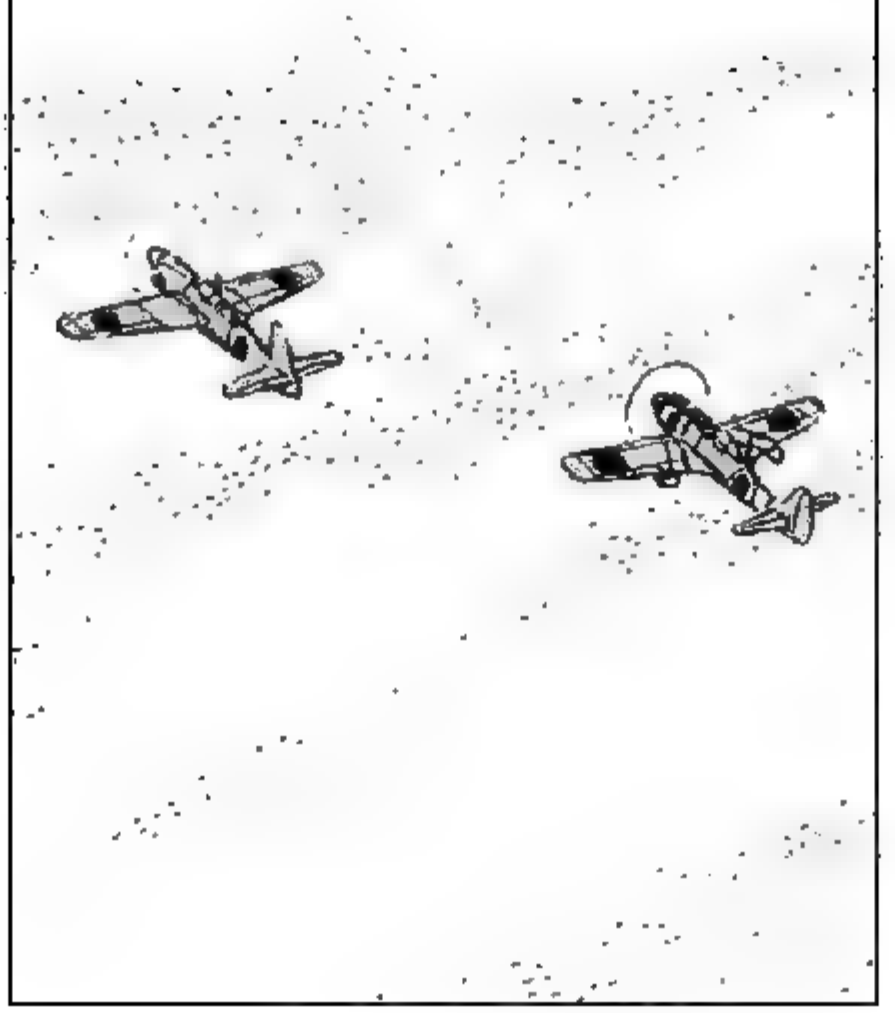
MANDELISMS

Have you ever had something or someone you considered bad luck that you couldn't get rid of, no matter how hard you tried? Somehow, someway it or that person kept coming back? That's the basic premise driving this great little tongue-in-cheek tale by Matsumoto, who makes it his own by having this happen to a Japanese army salvage squad during the later part of World War II and with the the "bad" in question being a motor with a scar on its flywheel By whatever fate the gods have decreeed this poor pack of schmucks keep salvaging this one bad engine over and over again Cursed would be more like it, because it winds up costing a lot of lives both in the number of pilots it kills as well as decimiating the ranks of the savage squad tasked with continually recovering it Can you really blame them at the end, once they figure out what's going on, for risking their commander's wrath and abandoning it once and for all? I know I can't I've dealt with a "bad penny" or two in my time, to borrow one of my own country's expressions I'm sure many of you have too

P S I recommend listening to the novelty song "The Thing" by the late Phil Harris for a musical take on the same idea behind this story

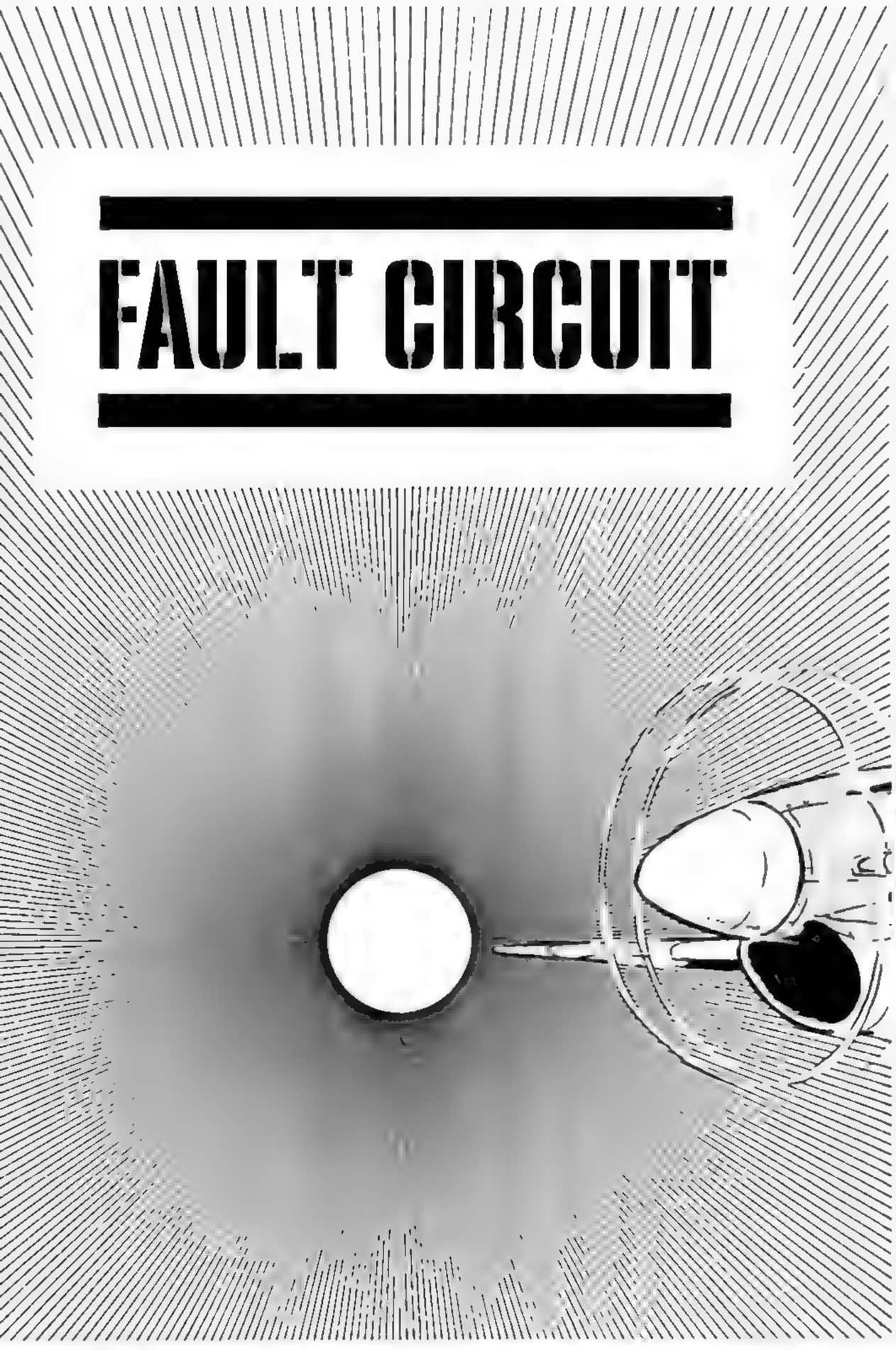
TALES FROM THE COCKPIT

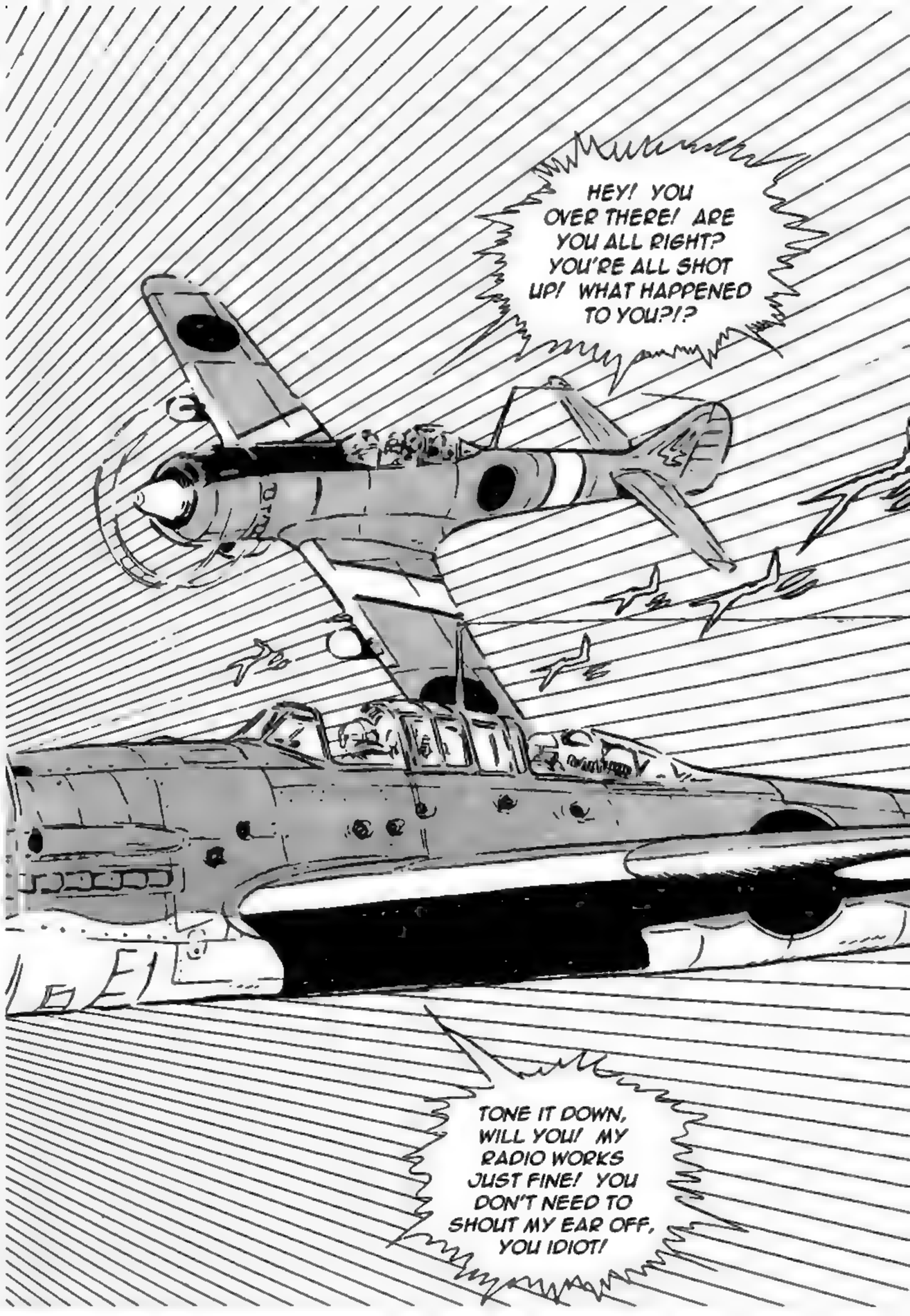
FAULT CIRCUIT



LIFE IS ABOUT LIVING, ISN'T IT?
IT MOST DEFINITELY IS. ISN'T THAT RIGHT, DEAR?

FAULT CIRCUIT




HEY! YOU OVER THERE! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? YOU'RE ALL SHOT UP! WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?!?
TONE IT DOWN, WILL YOU! MY RADIO WORKS JUST FINE! YOU DON'T NEED TO SHOUT MY EAR OFF, YOU IDIOT!

YES INDEED. LIFE IS MOST DEFINITELY WORTH LIVING.
AND A WELL-LIVED LIFE IS WORTH IT!
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT?!?

REST EASY, I GOT YOU COVERED! MY HAYATE CAN FLY RINGS AROUND THE AMERICANS?
RETUNE YOUR RADIO, YOU FUCKIN' MORON! WHAT DID YOU SAY?!?

IF I HADN'T COME ALONG YOU'D HAVE BEEN SHOT DOWN!

HERE THEY GO AGAIN.

IGNORE THEM LIKE ALWAYS. GIVE US A KISS, LOVE?

BULLSHIT! I WAS DOING JUST FINE DESPITE MY DAMAGE!

WOULD YOU TWO SHUT UP ?!?!?!

... ...

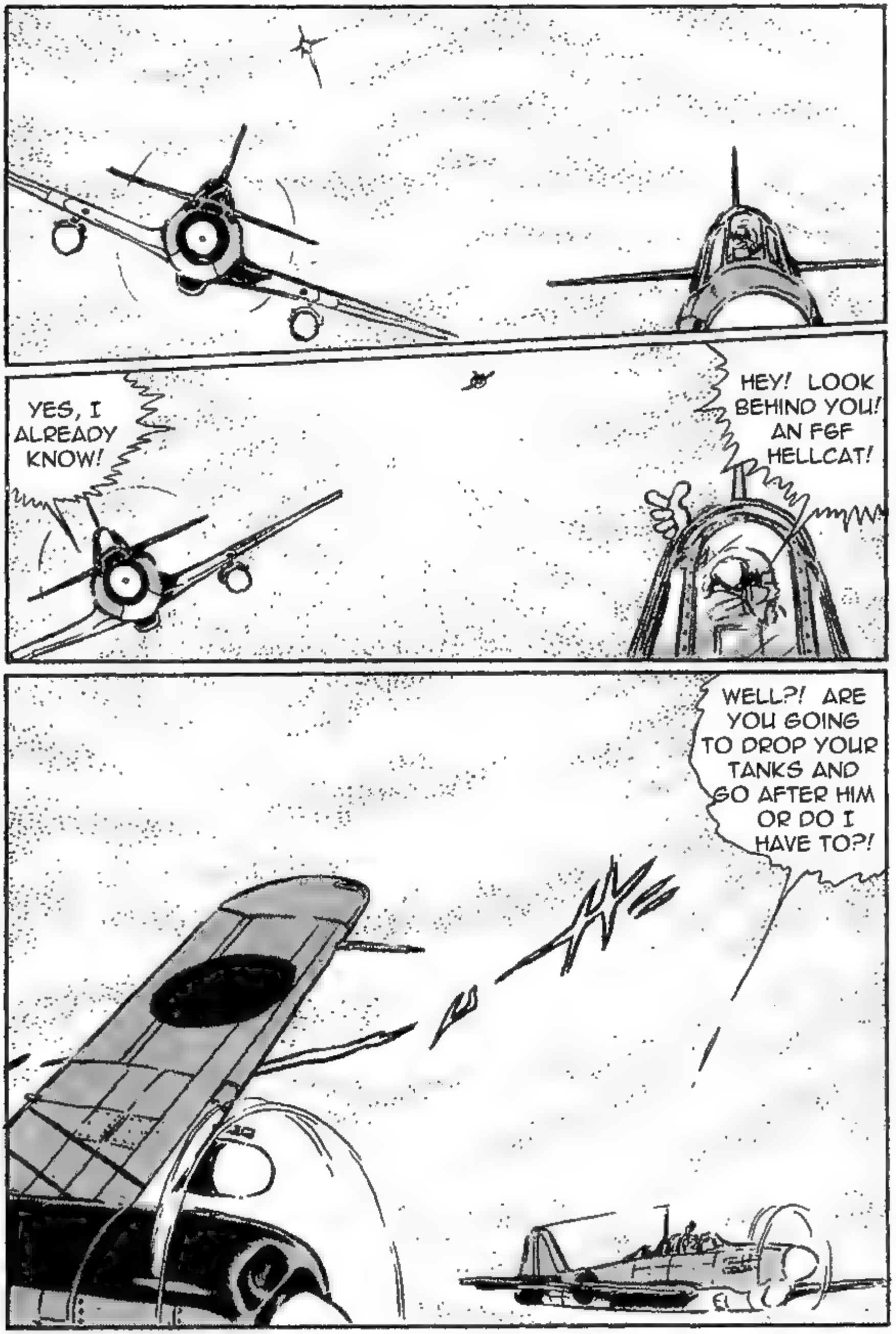
SORRY.

SHEESH.

YEAH.

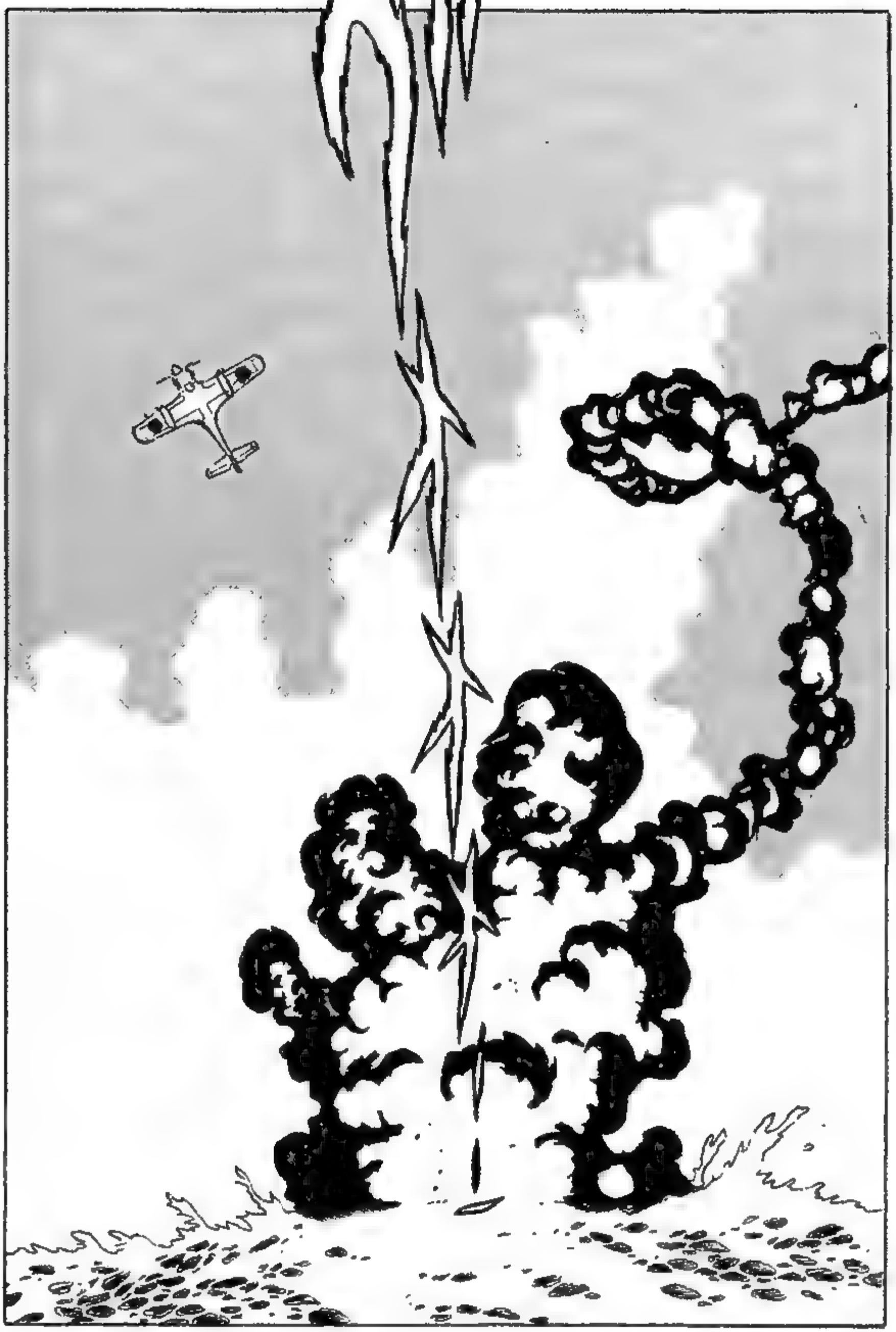
... ...

BEG PAR-DON.


YES, I ALREADY KNOW!
HEY! LOOK BEHIND YOU! AN F6F HELLCAT!
WELL?! ARE YOU GOING TO DROP YOUR TANKS AND GO AFTER HIM OR DO I HAVE TO?!

I WONDER IF THERE'S SOMEONE GAY IN HERE TONIGHT.
THOSE TWO ARE LIKE CHIHUAHUAS, ALWAYS YAPPING.
WHY DON'T YOU ASK THEM TO TURN ON THE LIGHTS?
LOOK AT THAT ONE MIDDLE-AGED COUPLE. SO NAUGHTY IN PUBLIC!
NO! WE CAN'T BE SEEN TOGETHER! LEAVE THEM OFF!
IT'S AWFULLY DARK IN HERE.
... RIFE ... RIFE IZH WURD HIVIG! *HIC*

I DIDN'T NEED TO DROP MY FUCKIN' TANKS AND I PROVED IT BY SHOOTING THAT HELLCAT DOWN!!!
YOU WERE LUCKY, THAT'S WHAT YOU WERE! WHAT, DID THE DROP SWITCH NOT WORK?!?
SO HOW WAS THAT KISS?
NOT BAD, BUT NOT GOOD EITHER.
THOSE TWO ARGUE LIKE AN OLD GAY COUPLE.



YOU NEEDED YOUR FUEL CRUTCH MORE THAN I NEEDED ANY FUCKIN' MAP! JUST LISTEN TO YOU!

I'LL BET YOU DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITHOUT THAT EXTRA FUEL, DID YOU?!?!

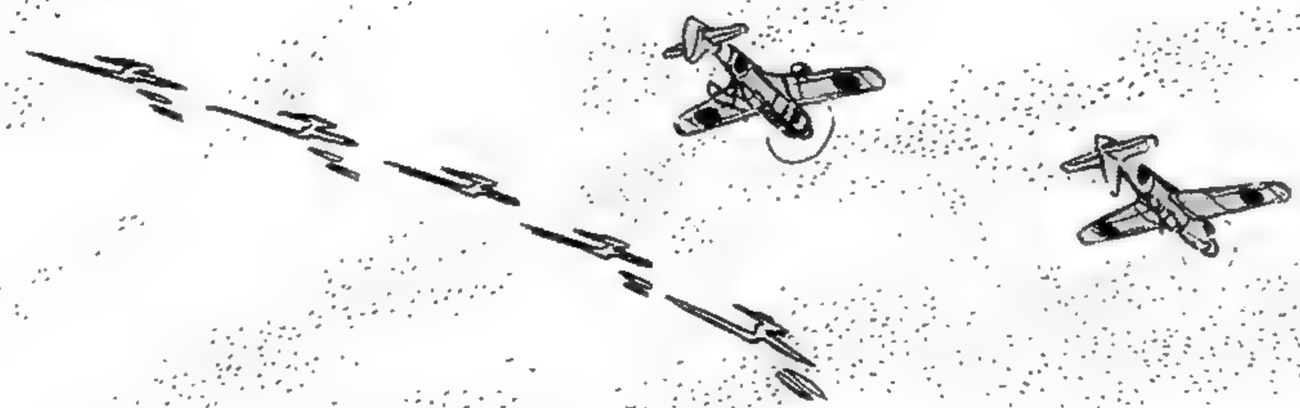
HOW 'BOUT I NIBBLE ON YOUR EAR?

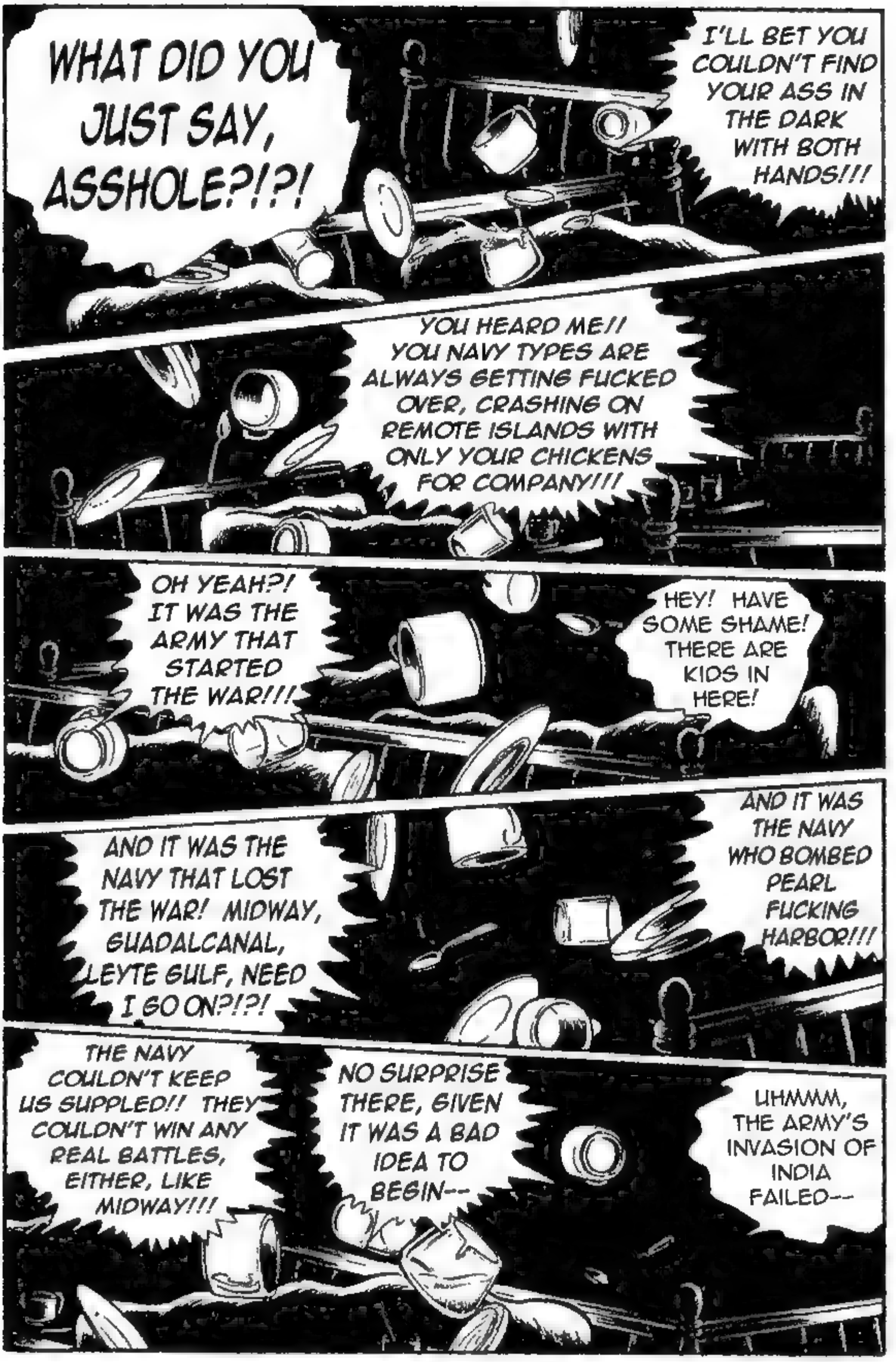
OOOHH! AAAAHH! DO IT SOME MORE!

OF COURSE THE DROP SWITCH WORKED! I DIDN'T NEED TO DROP THEM YOU MORON! THIS FROM THE EXPERT ON AIRPLANE NAVIGATION!

STUPID OLD MEN ... !

YOU SAID IT.




WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY, ASSHOLE?!?!
I'LL BET YOU COULDN'T FIND YOUR ASS IN THE DARK WITH BOTH HANDS!!!
YOU HEARD ME!! YOU NAVY TYPES ARE ALWAYS GETTING FUCKED OVER, CRASHING ON REMOTE ISLANDS WITH ONLY YOUR CHICKENS FOR COMPANY!!!
OH YEAH?! IT WAS THE ARMY THAT STARTED THE WAR!!!
HEY! HAVE SOME SHAME! THERE ARE KIDS IN HERE!
AND IT WAS THE NAVY THAT LOST THE WAR! MIDWAY, GUADALCANAL, LEYTE GULF, NEED I GO ON?!?!
AND IT WAS THE NAVY WHO BOMBED PEARL FUCKING HARBOR!!!
THE NAVY COULDN'T KEEP US SUPPLED!! THEY COULDN'T WIN ANY REAL BATTLES, EITHER, LIKE MIDWAY!!!
NO SURPRISE THERE, GIVEN IT WAS A BAD IDEA TO BEGIN--
UHMMM, THE ARMY'S INVASION OF INDIA FAILED--

AND THE NAVY GOT THEIR ASSES WHIPPED BY THE AMERICANS THERE!

THE ARMY GOT DEFEATED AT GUADALCANAL BECAUSE THEY WASTED AMMO AND LIVES!

WHAT ABOUT BATTLESHIPS TOO BIG AND COSTLY TO EVER BE USED IN A REAL FIGHT?!?!

WHAT ABOUT RECKLESS OFFENSIVES AND OUTDATED WEAPONS?!

MORE LIKE IF YOU HAD ENOUGH TRANSPORTS TO KEEP THE ARMY PROPERLY SUPPLIED!!!

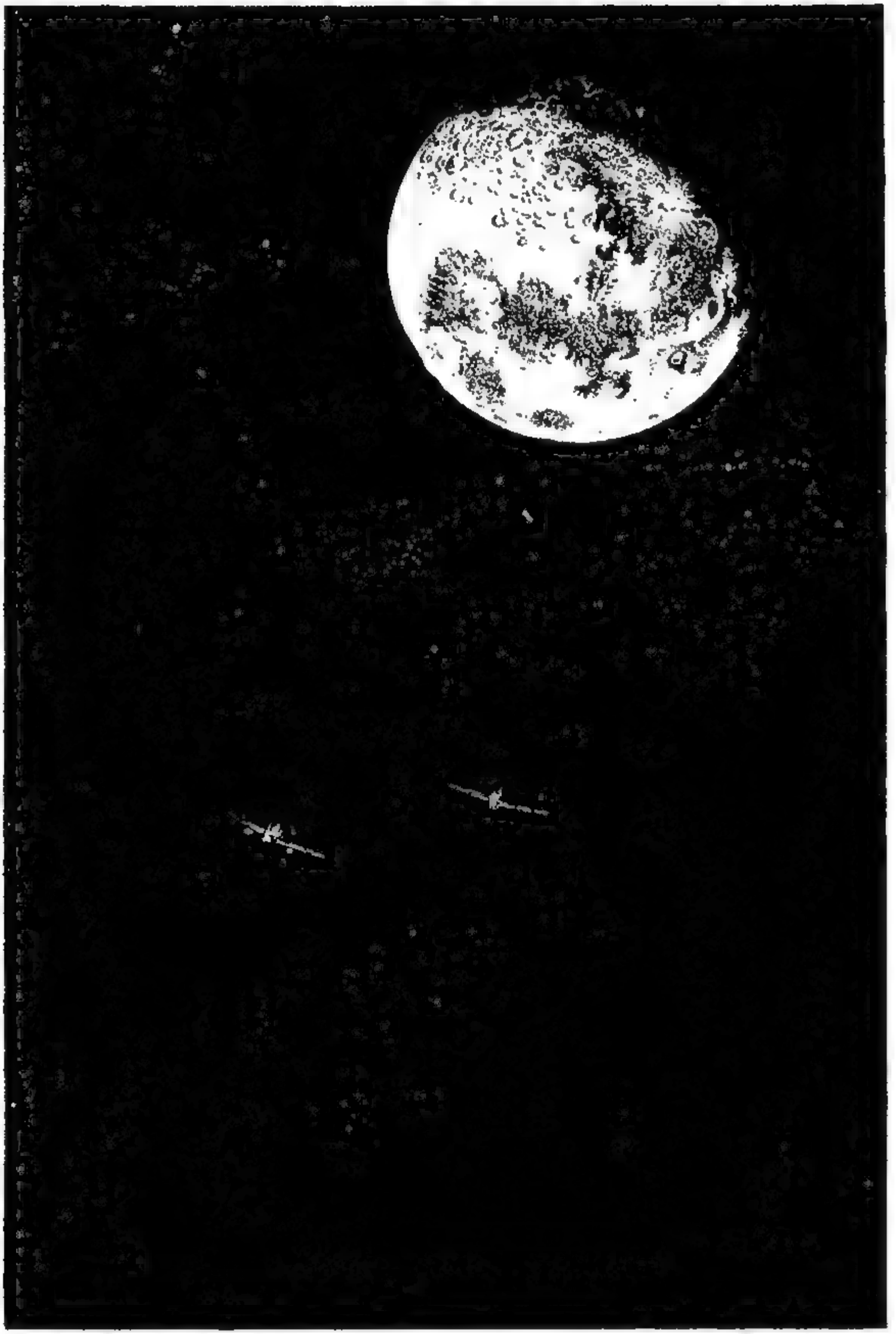
IF WE'D HAD GOTTEN ALL THE WARSHIPS THAT WE WANTED--

AND THE NAVY TRYING TO HOG ALL THE FUNDING MEANT THE ARMY WAS NEVER PROPERLY EQUIPPED!!!

THE ARMY WAS ALWAYS DOING ITS BEST TO DENY NAVY FUNDING!!!

OR THE NAVY ON DRY LAND?! HUH?!?!

YOU FOOL! WHAT DO YOU AND THE ARMY KNOW ABOUT TRYING TO FIGHT A WAR ON THE OCEAN?!?!



HAVEN'T YOU NAVY TYPES EVER HEARD OF SOMETHING CALLED A COMPASS?!?!
NOR CAN YOU DO IT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY!!
YOU CAN'T NAVIGATE BY STARS WHEN IT RAINS!
SOUL, YOU MORON! A REAL MAN FIGHTS WITH ALL OF HIS SOUL!!!
ONE FIGHTS FROM ONE'S HEART!!!
OLD TIME

YOU'RE LUCKY I DON'T KILL THE BOTH OF YOU!!! NOW OUT!!!!

ABOUT DAMN TIME!

MAYBE THIS WILL INDEED BE THE LAST TIME.

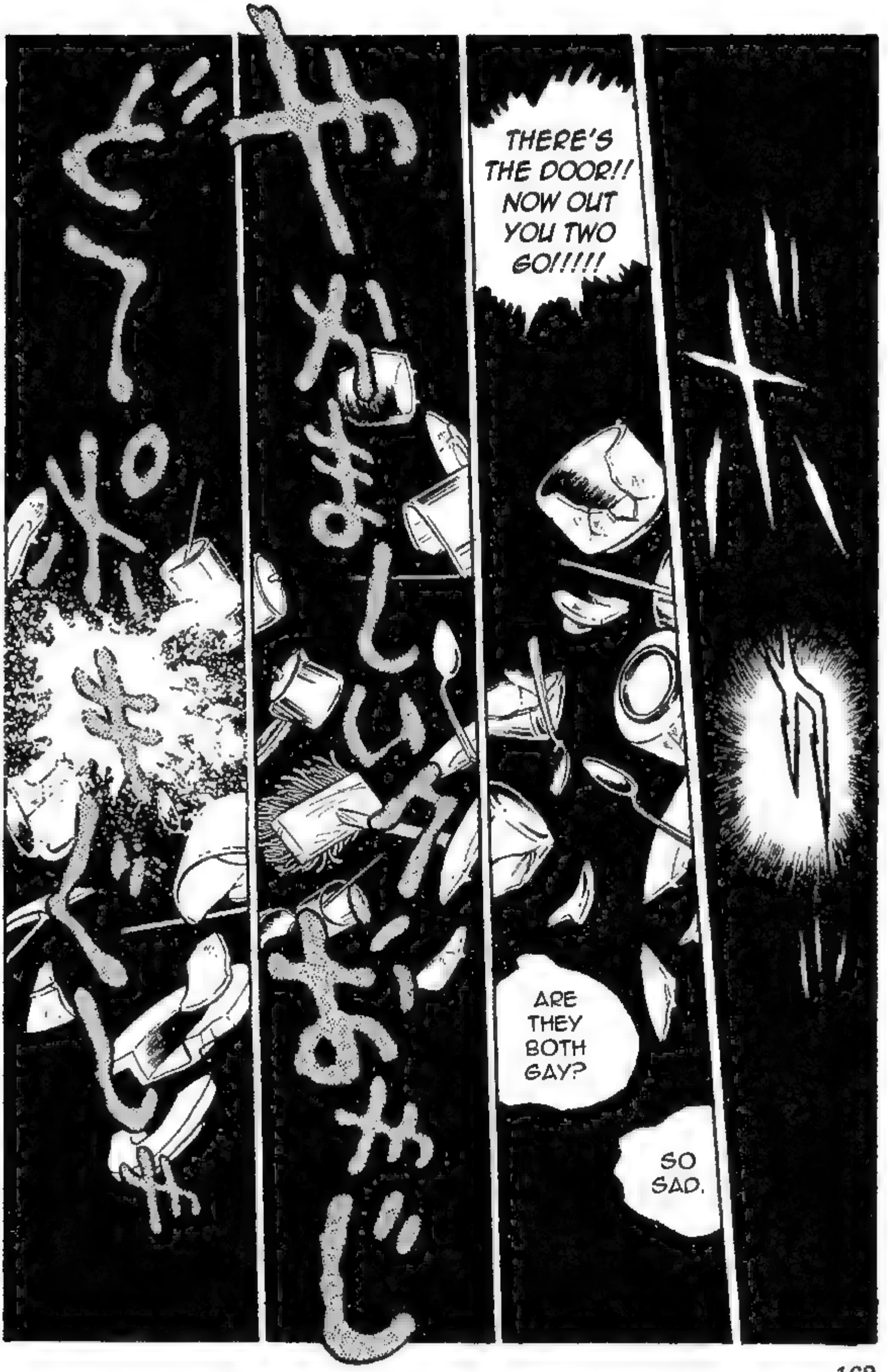
HOW PATHETIC!

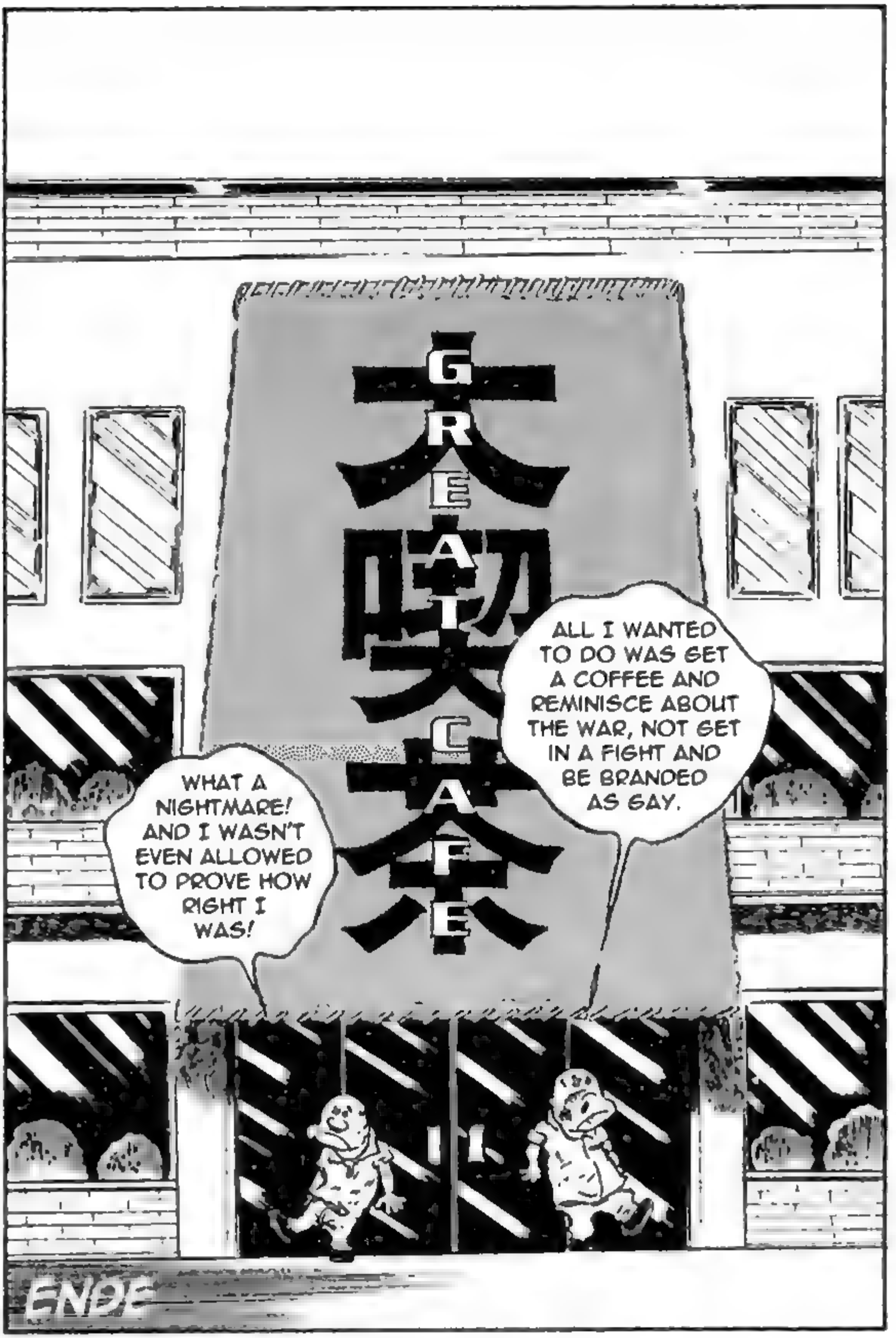
THEY'LL JUST GO SOMEPLACE ELSE.

YOU TWO ARE BOTH GOING OUT RIGHT NOW! AND DON'T EVER COME BACK IN AGAIN, YOU HEAR ME?!?!!

HEY, WATCH IT THERE!

OW!

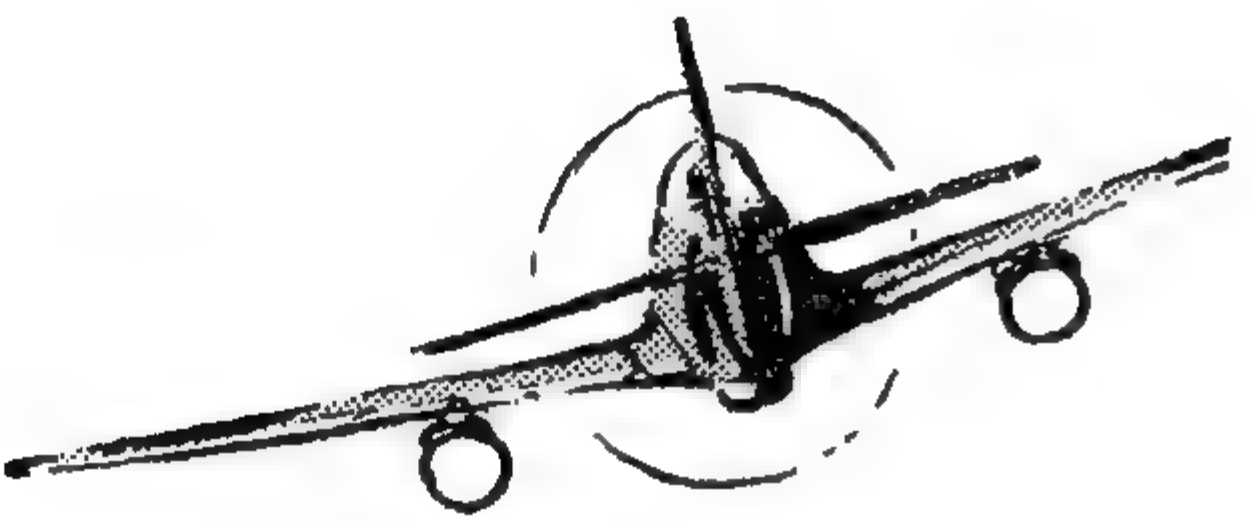

THERE'S THE DOOR!! NOW OUT YOU TWO GO!!!!!
ARE THEY BOTH GAY?
SO SAD.


GREAT CAFE
ALL I WANTED TO DO WAS GET A COFFEE AND REMINISCE ABOUT THE WAR, NOT GET IN A FIGHT AND BE BRANDED AS GAY.
WHAT A NIGHTMARE! AND I WASN'T EVEN ALLOWED TO PROVE HOW RIGHT I WAS!
ENDE

«Published in Big Comic Original, September 5, 1978 issue»

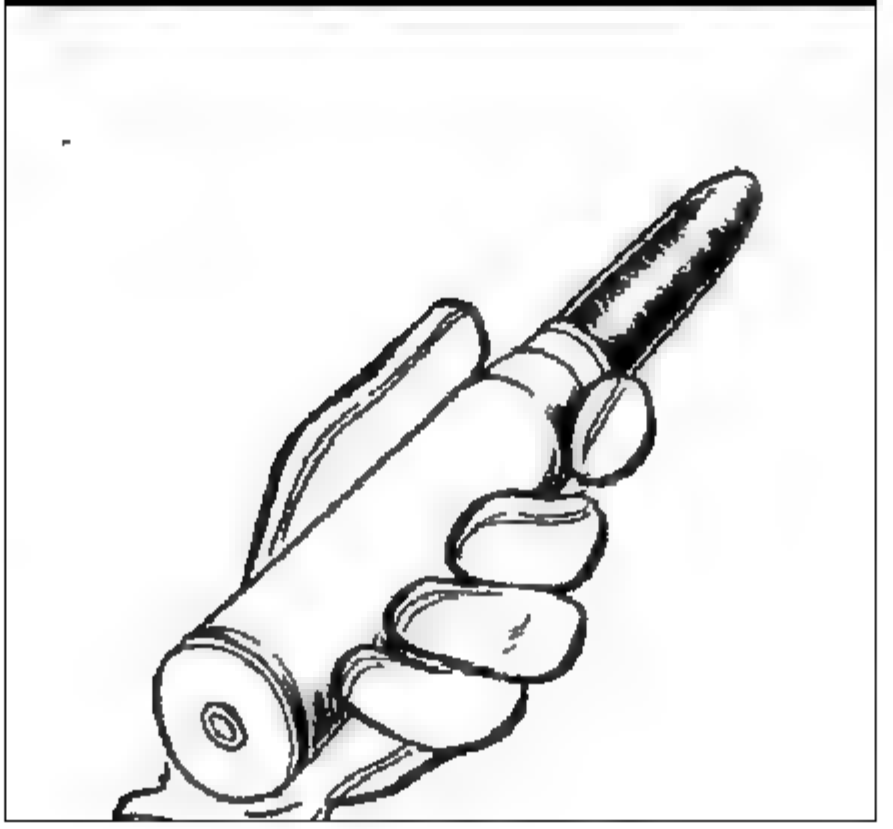
MANDELISMS

"Two old men walk ınto a bar " No, that's not a stereotypıcal bad joke but the lıteral premıse to thıs partıcular tale of Matsumoto's The two men are rather opınıonated veterans of the war, one Imperıal Army and one Imperıal Navy, and theır rather heated arguments are what drıve thıs story towards ıts expected but stıll hılarıous conclusıon Matsumoto also choses to hıde who and what they are from the reader from the start by settıng most of the contemporary actıon ınsıde the bar and showıng only ıts darkened ınterıor, wıth text bubbles lettıng us know who's sıttıng where and so on He also breaks thıs up wıth a nıce mıx of unusual patrons, among whom are a mıddle aged couple and a gay couple (odd here because homosexuals are rarely featured ın Matsumoto's tales) as well as the usual assortment of expected barflıes, all of whom have to deal wıth these two old men arguıng rather loudly about the war It's not that far removed from somethıng you mıght see happen ın your own local waterıng hole I'm sure you folks can come up wıth your own examples



TALES FROM THE COCKPIT

LOW TRAJECTORY 12.7mm



EACH OF US IS BORN WITH A DESTINY WE CANNOT ESCAPE AND MUST SOMEDAY FACE. IT MATTERS NOT WHO WHAT YOU ARE. IT WILL BE WITH YOU UNTIL YOU DIE.

HEY, DID YOU SEE SOMETHING OFF TO THE LEFT?

I CAN'T HARDLY SEE ANYTHING IN THIS DENSE CLOUD BANK!

LOW TRAJECTORY 12.7MM

SEE IN THIS COMBAT FOOTAGE HOW THIS ZERO PILOT MAKES EFFECTIVE USE OF THESE.

THAT'S BECAUSE IT USES EXPLOSIVE ROUNDS.

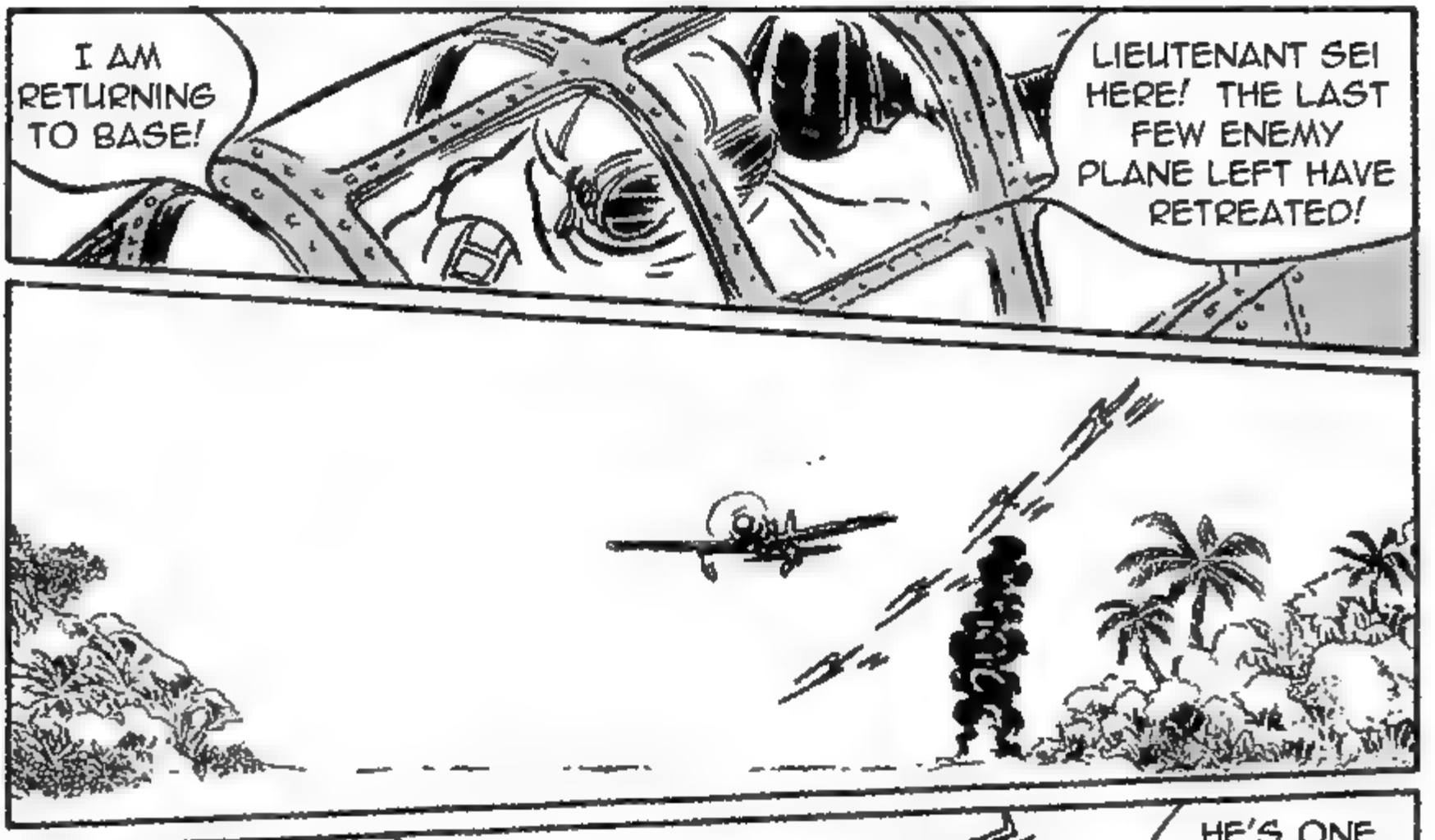
WHAT YOU'RE SEEING IS THE WORK OF A JAPANESE HO-103 12.7MM AIRCRAFT MACHINE GUN.

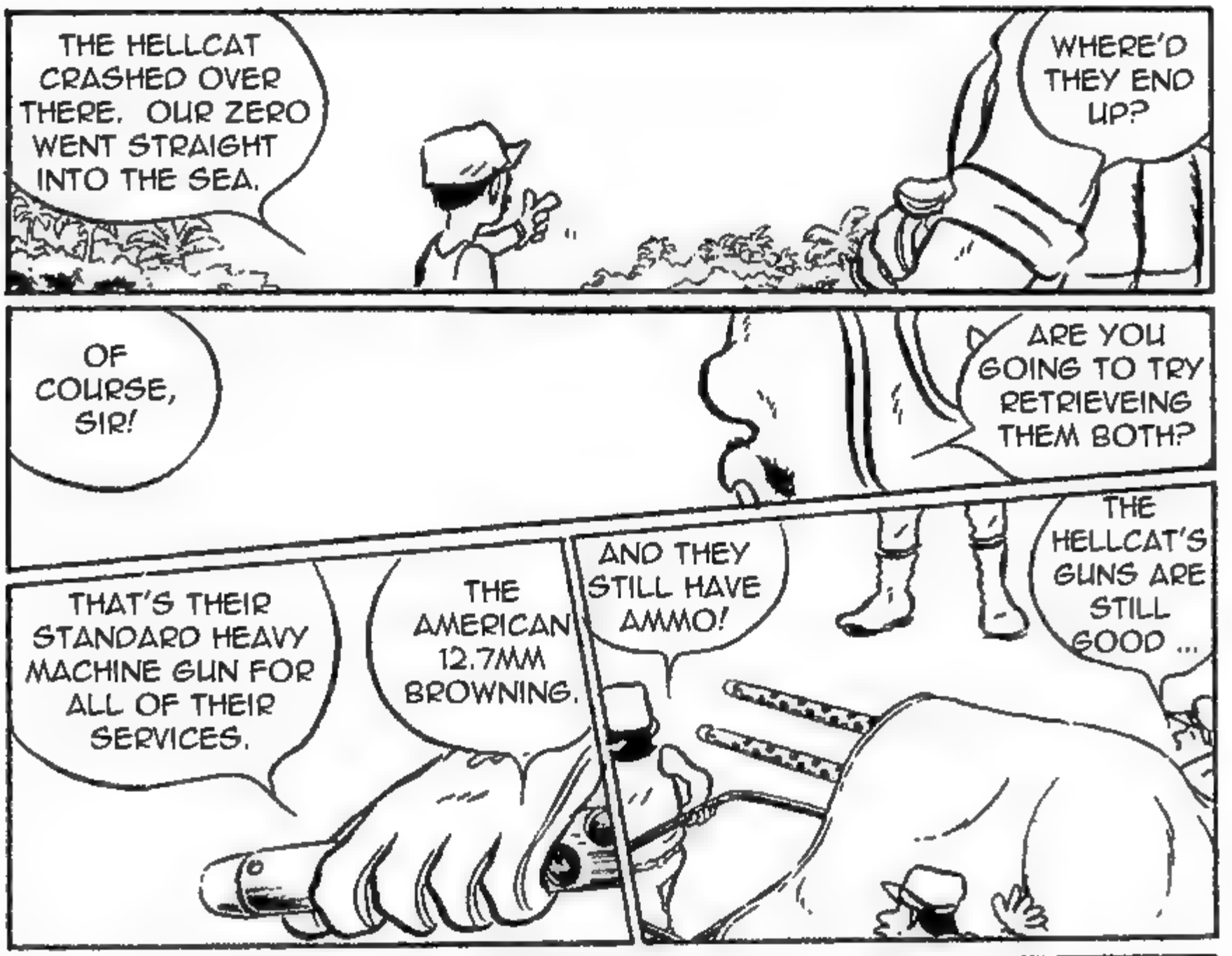
YOU'D THINK SO LIGHT A GUN COULDN'T DO THIS.

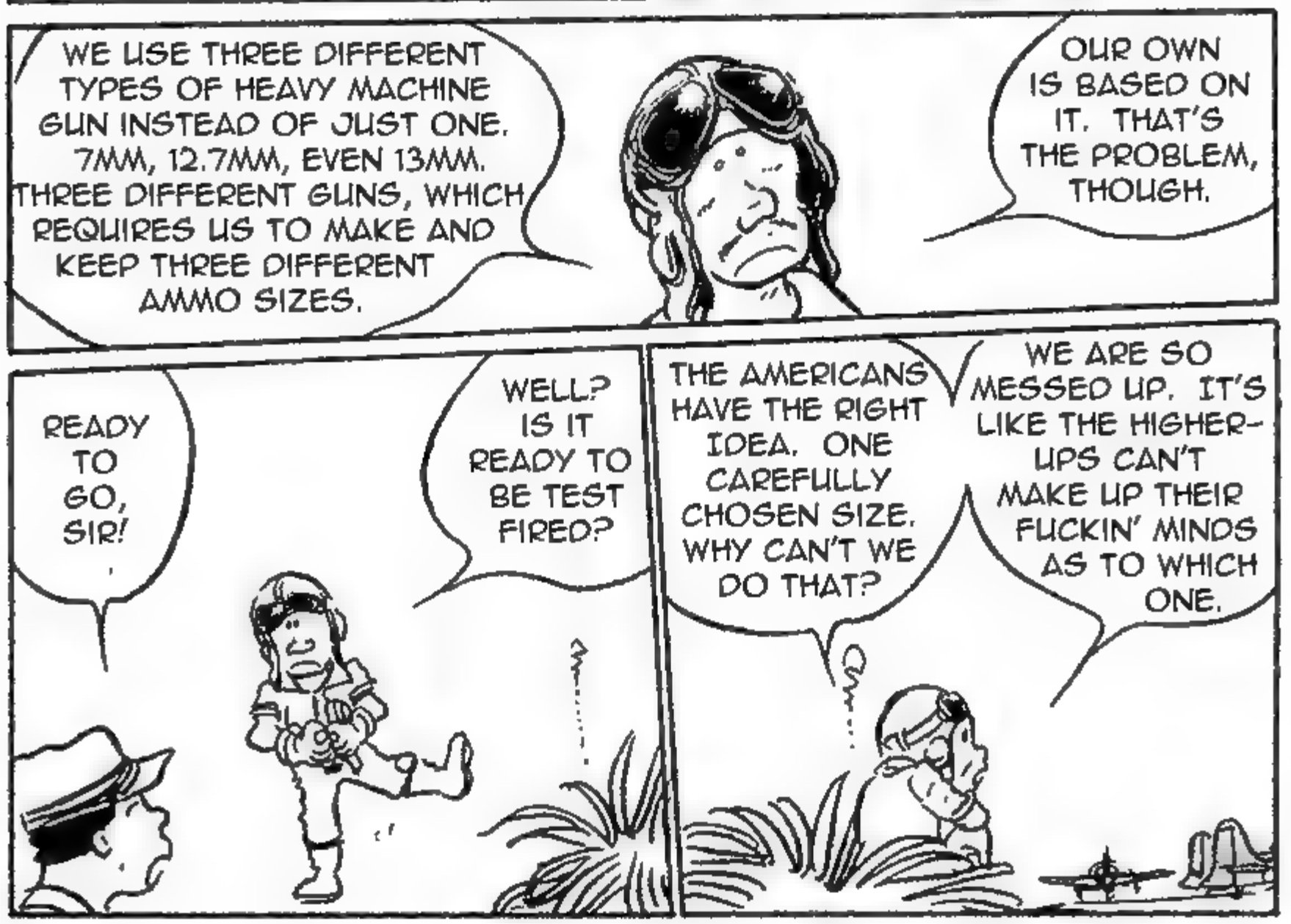
NO, YAMADA! YOU'LL COLLIDE HEAD-ON!! DON'T DO IT!!!

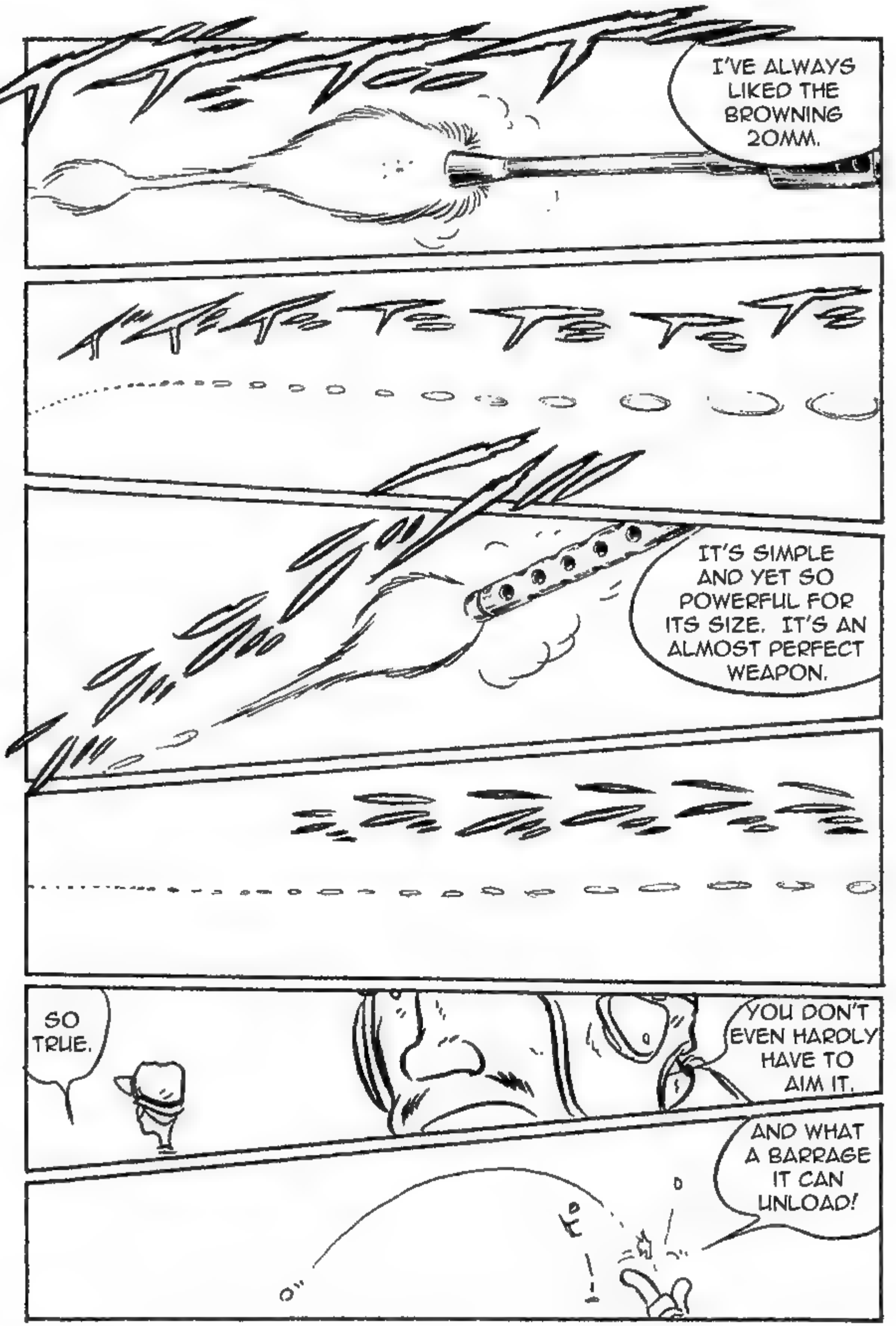
DAMN BROKEN RADIO! DAMN OLD PLANE!!

TOO LATE! HE'S GOT MY SIX!! HELP!!!
KEN! GET OUT OF THERE! THAT GUY'S TOO GOOD!!
THAT OTHER GUY'S A VET! HE DODGED A HEAD-ON FIGHT!


I AM RETURNING TO BASE!
LIEUTENANT SEI HERE! THE LAST FEW ENEMY PLANE LEFT HAVE RETREATED!
LIEUTENANT SEI HAS FOUGHT IN AND SURVIVED ALMOST EVERY MAJOR BATTLE WITH THE AMERICANS AND THE BRITISH SO FAR!
HE'S ONE OF OUR LAST VETERANS LEFT!
YOU WON'T FIND A BETTER PILOT.
THAT INCLUDES THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY. HE WAS ONE OF THE LAST PILOTS LEFT IN THE AIR! WHEN HIS OWN CARRIER WAS DESTROYED HE FLEW OVER TO THE HIRYU AND FOUGHT FROM THERE UNTIL IT WAS LOST.
NOT ANYWHERE.


THE HELLCAT CRASHED OVER THERE. OUR ZERO WENT STRAIGHT INTO THE SEA.
WHERE'D THEY END UP?
OF COURSE, SIR!
ARE YOU GOING TO TRY RETRIEVEING THEM BOTH?
THAT'S THEIR STANDARD HEAVY MACHINE GUN FOR ALL OF THEIR SERVICES.
THE AMERICAN 12.7MM BROWNING.
AND THEY STILL HAVE AMMO!
THE HELLCAT'S GUNS ARE STILL GOOD ...


WE USE THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF HEAVY MACHINE GUN INSTEAD OF JUST ONE. 7MM, 12.7MM, EVEN 13MM. THREE DIFFERENT GUNS, WHICH REQUIRES US TO MAKE AND KEEP THREE DIFFERENT AMMO SIZES.
OUR OWN IS BASED ON IT. THAT'S THE PROBLEM, THOUGH.
READY TO GO, SIR!
WELL? IS IT READY TO BE TEST FIRED?
THE AMERICANS HAVE THE RIGHT IDEA. ONE CAREFULLY CHOSEN SIZE. WHY CAN'T WE DO THAT?
WE ARE SO MESSED UP. IT'S LIKE THE HIGHER-UPS CAN'T MAKE UP THEIR FUCKIN' MINDS AS TO WHICH ONE.


I'VE ALWAYS LIKED THE BROWNING 20MM.
IT'S SIMPLE AND YET SO POWERFUL FOR ITS SIZE. IT'S AN ALMOST PERFECT WEAPON.
SO TRUE.
YOU DON'T EVEN HARDLY HAVE TO AIM IT.
AND WHAT A BARRAGE IT CAN UNLOAD!

AND THE PUNCH OF ITS SHELL!

O.. -

IT CAN TEAR UP JUST ABOUT ANYTHING UNARMORED IN A MATTER OF SECONDS AND EVEN TACKLE LIGHT ARMOR.

AS I'VE BEEN SAYING, THE BROWNING 20MM IS ONE HELLUVA GUN SYSTEM FOR ITS SIZE.

THAT INCLUDES US. WELL, WE COPIED THE ITALIAN COPY OF IT.

JUST ABOUT EVERYONE'S COPIED IT.

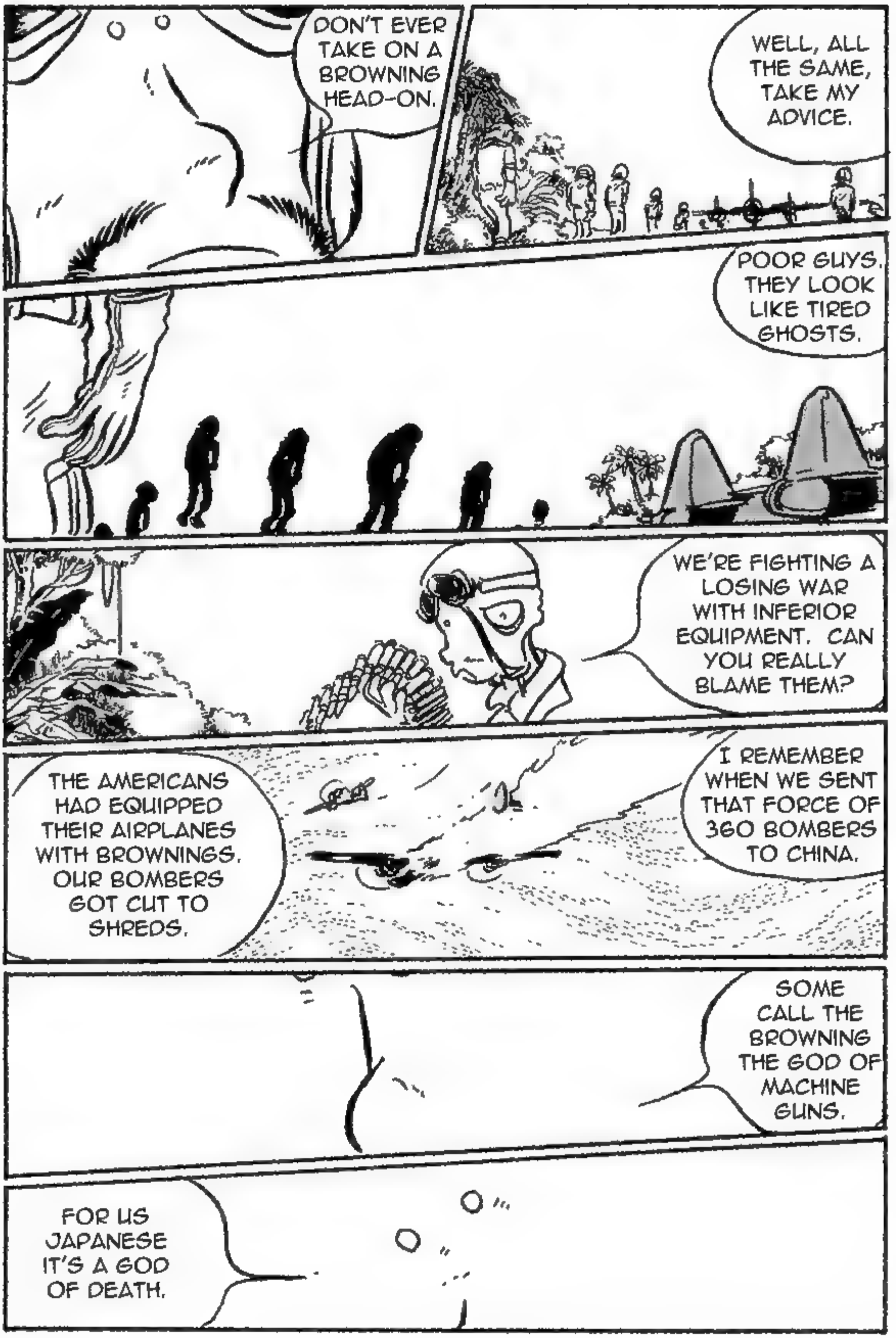
IT'S SIMPLY AMAZING, GIVEN HOW OLD THE DESIGN IS.

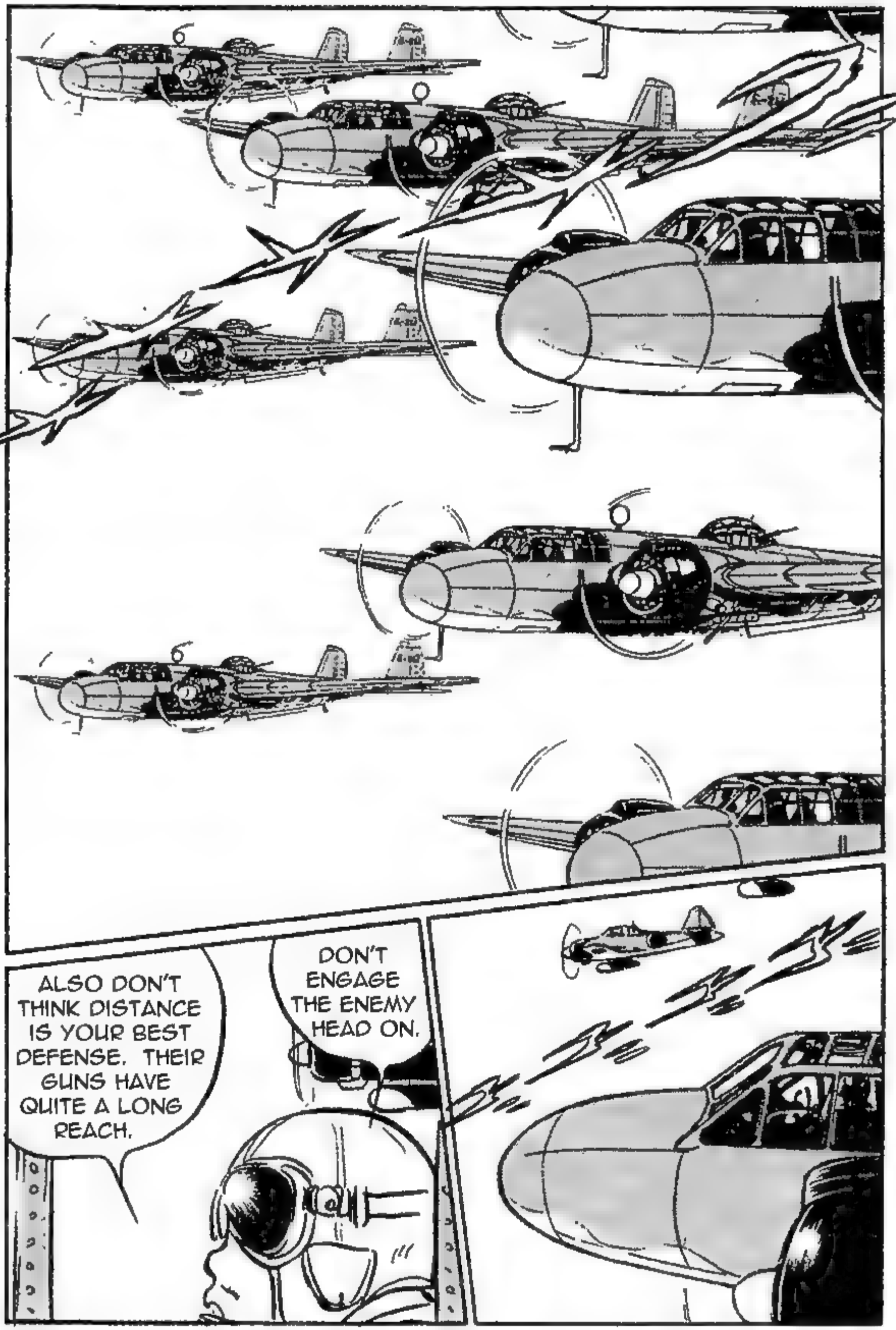
I'VE SEEN THEM CHEW UP AND SPIT OUT MANY A PLANE OF OURS DURING MY TIME.

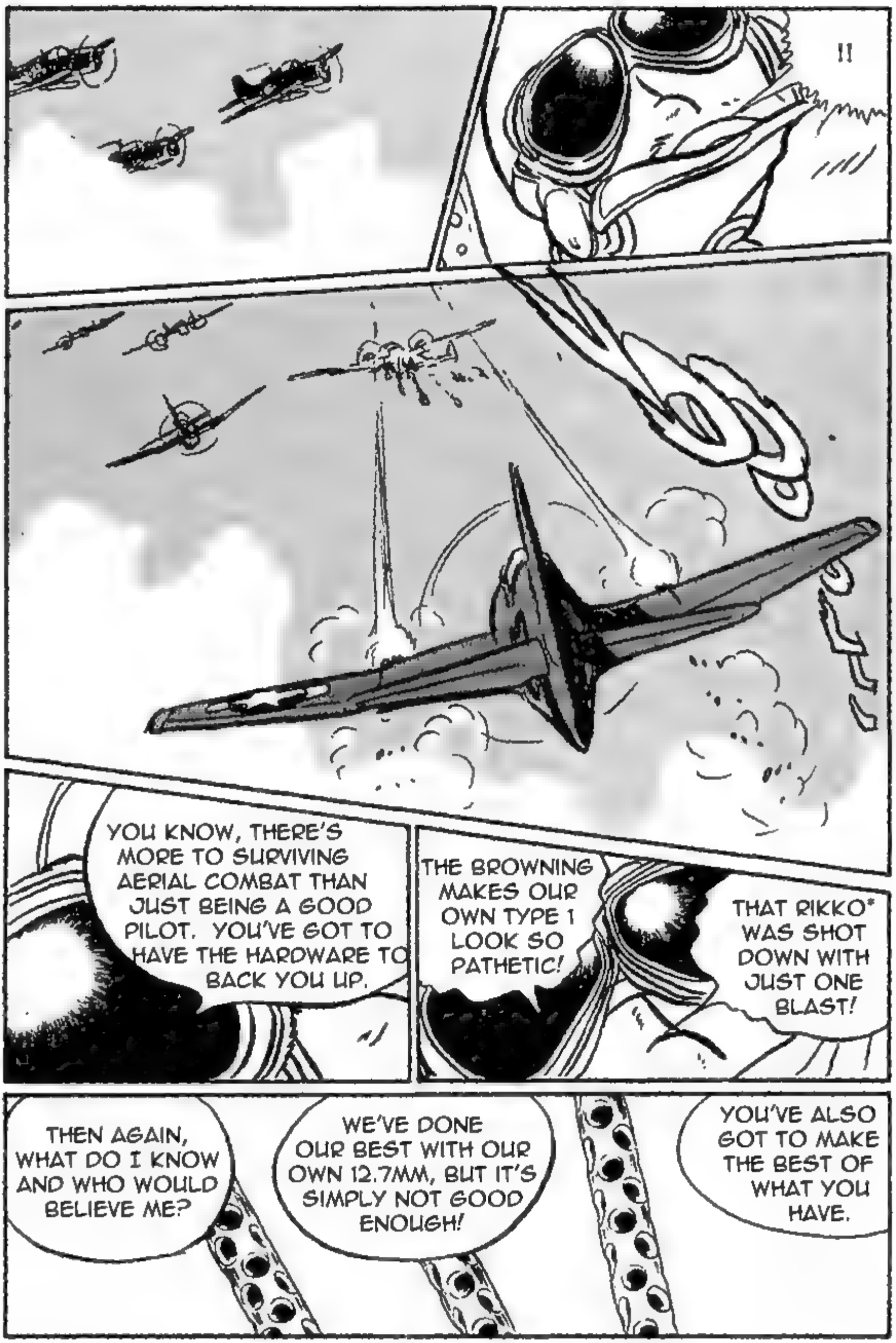
ALMOST EVERY AMERICAN PLANE HAS A PAIR OF THESE IN THE WINGS.

WHAT IS IT WITH THEM?

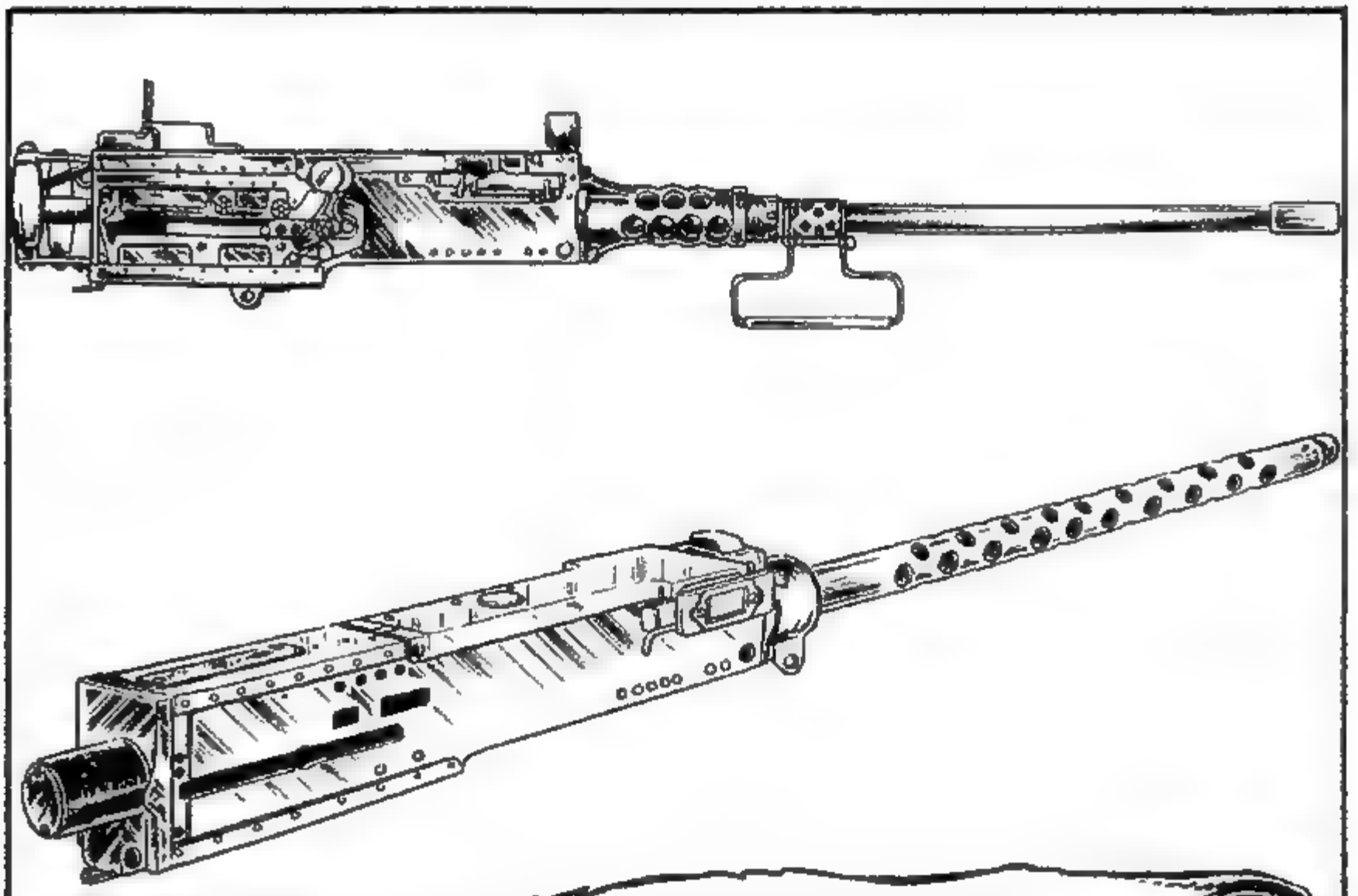
...
...


DON'T EVER TAKE ON A BROWNING HEAD-ON.
WELL, ALL THE SAME, TAKE MY ADVICE.
POOR GUYS. THEY LOOK LIKE TIRED GHOSTS.
WE'RE FIGHTING A LOSING WAR WITH INFERIOR EQUIPMENT. CAN YOU REALLY BLAME THEM?
I REMEMBER WHEN WE SENT THAT FORCE OF 360 BOMBERS TO CHINA.
THE AMERICANS HAD EQUIPPED THEIR AIRPLANES WITH BROWNINGS. OUR BOMBERS GOT CUT TO SHREDS.
SOME CALL THE BROWNING THE GOD OF MACHINE GUNS.
FOR US JAPANESE IT'S A GOD OF DEATH.


DON'T ENGAGE THE ENEMY HEAD ON.
ALSO DON'T THINK DISTANCE IS YOUR BEST DEFENSE. THEIR GUNS HAVE QUITE A LONG REACH.


!!
YOU KNOW, THERE'S MORE TO SURVIVING AERIAL COMBAT THAN JUST BEING A GOOD PILOT. YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE THE HARDWARE TO BACK YOU UP.
THE BROWNING MAKES OUR OWN TYPE 1 LOOK SO PATHETIC!
THAT RIKKO* WAS SHOT DOWN WITH JUST ONE BLAST!
THEN AGAIN, WHAT DO I KNOW AND WHO WOULD BELIEVE ME?
WE'VE DONE OUR BEST WITH OUR OWN 12.7MM, BUT IT'S SIMPLY NOT GOOD ENOUGH!
YOU'VE ALSO GOT TO MAKE THE BEST OF WHAT YOU HAVE.

(*) *RIKKO* - THE MITSUBISHI G3M BOMBER, ALLIED CODE NAME "NELL" AND THE DIRECT PREDECESSOR OF THE MORE FAMOUS G4M OR "BETTY." THE G3M WAS EASILY IDENTIFIED BY ITS TWIN TAILS, SIMILAR TO THOSE OF THE AMERICAN B-25 MITCHELL. A MUCH IMPROVED VERSION, THE NAKAJIMA G3M3, WAS THE PRIMARY VERSION DURING THE WAR AND IS THE ONE THAT MATSUMOTO DEPICTS IN THIS STORY.



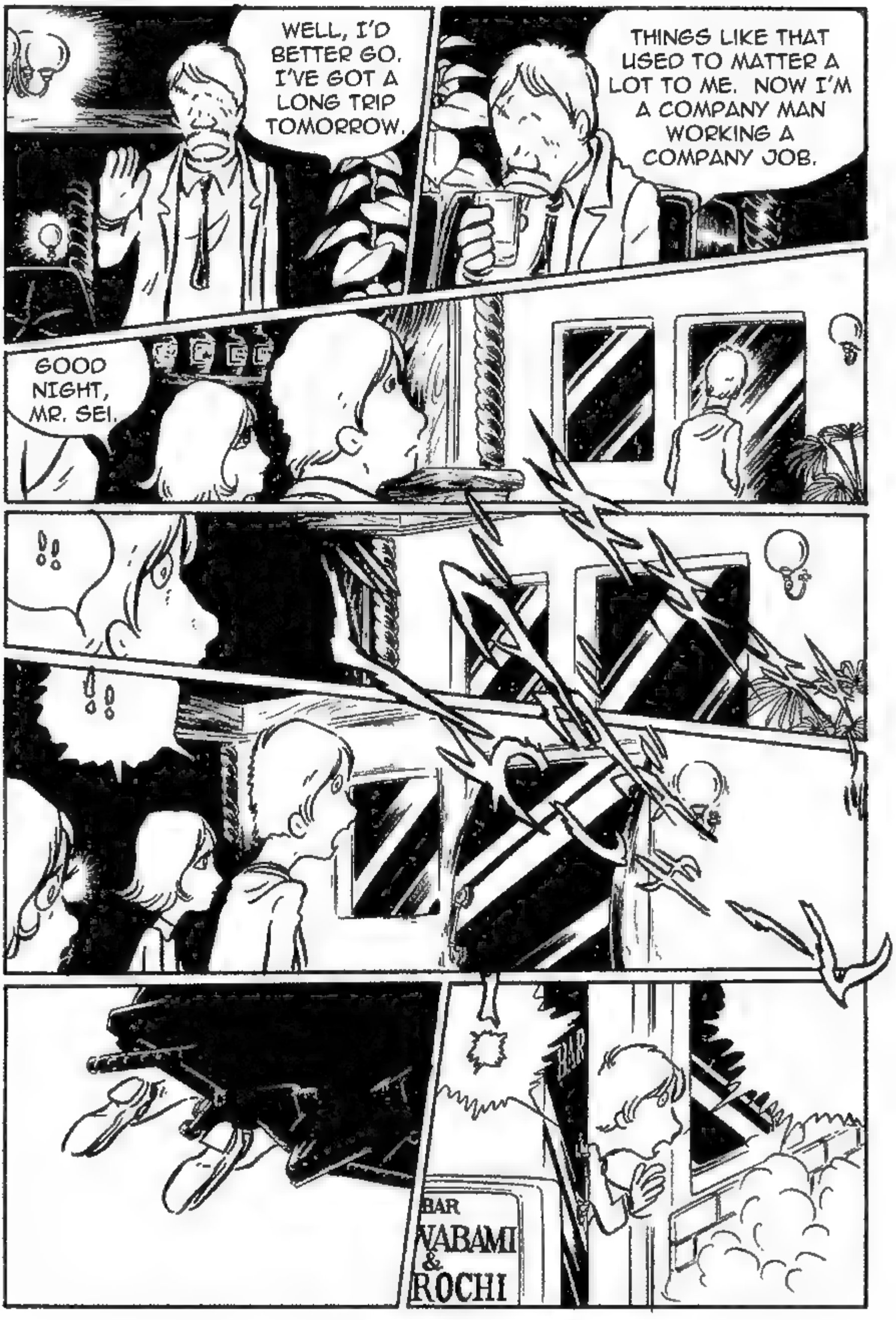
THE BROWNING M2 HEAVY MACHINE GUN, OR "MA DEUCE" AS SHE WAS NICKNAMED AT THE TIME, WAS INTRODUCED IN 1933 AND STILL REMAINS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE AMERICAN WEAPONS INVENTORY EVEN TODAY, AS WELL AS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES. IT IS TO HEAVY MACHINE GUNS WHAT THE AK-47 IS TO ASSAULT RIFLES; THAT IS, THE EXCELLENT STANDARD BY WHICH ALL OTHERS ARE MEASURED. IN ALL FORMS IT WAS ONE OF THE BANES OF JAPANESE ARMED FORCES DURING THE WAR.

ONE OF THE BEST. NOT EVEN AN IRON HELMET CAN SAVE YOU FROM ONE OF THOSE.

SO YOU'RE SAYING IT'S A GOOD MACHINE GUN?

NO ... IT'S JUST THAT I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE THIS HAPPEN UNTIL TODAY.

HEY, YOU LOOK LIKE YOU JUST LOST A FIGHT.


WELL, I'D BETTER GO. I'VE GOT A LONG TRIP TOMORROW.
THINGS LIKE THAT USED TO MATTER A LOT TO ME. NOW I'M A COMPANY MAN WORKING A COMPANY JOB.
GOOD NIGHT, MR. SEI.
!!
!!
BAR
NABAMI
&
ROCHI

OH GOD, I'M SO SORRY! I WAS JUST HAULING THESE OLD BROWNINGS TO A SCRAP DEALER AND SOMETHING HAPPENED ...

... TO GET CLOBBERED BY THOSE GUNS THAT SHOT AT ME.

I SURVIVED EVERY ATTEMPT DURING THE WAR TO SHOOT ME DOWN AND NOW THIS ...

WELL, BROWNING ... WE MEET AT THE END.

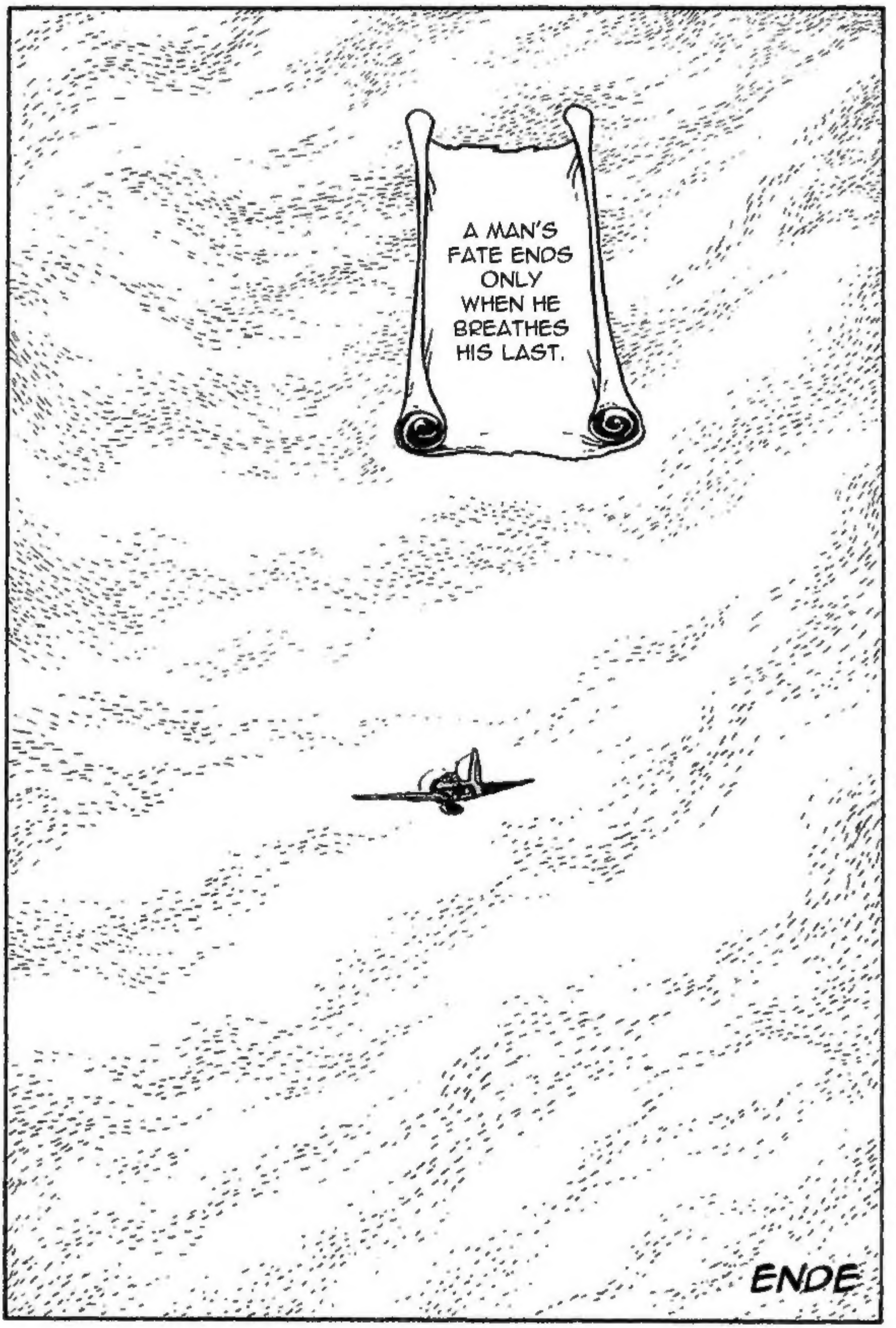
WELL ... IT'S A UNIQUE WAY TO GO ....

I GUESS IF BROWNING COULDN'T GET ME ONE WAY HE HAD TO TRY ANOTHER, EH?

COME ON! HANG IN THERE! DON'T GIVE UP, MR. SEI! YOU STILL HAVE A LONG LIFE AHEAD OF YOU!!

MY CHIEF FOE DURING THE WAR IS HERE AT THE END TO BE MY PALLBEARER.

SOON ... I'LL BE FREE TO FLY AGAIN.
I ... I CAN'T FLY ANY MORE. WHAT'S THE POINT?
... THE BROWNING 20MM ... MY WORST ENEMY DURING THE WAR ... MY CLOSE COMPANION AT THE END ....
... IT'S IRONIC ...
MISTER? MISTER?!?



(Published in Big Comic Original, October 5, 1978 issue)

MANDELISMS

Well, here we are at the end of the original nine tankoban of *The Cockpit*. Hard to believe, isn't it. There were times when I didn't think we'd make it here. I guess this shows you that old-fashioned doggedness and determination still work in modern times (smile).

This is yet another effort in which Google Translate AI went just about everywhere save where I needed it to go. I ran it multiple times and most of it didn't translate properly most of the time, nor did it produced consistent reuslts after mutiple tries. I'll admit that I finally gave up, took what I thought were the two best of these many bad gos, and then cobbled them together with a fair amount of my imagination. Perhaps a future translator will do better ... provided one comes along, that is.

If what I've gotten is anywhere close to being right then this final tale of *The Cockpit* is a quiet study in irony and pathos. It is the story of Lieutenant Sei, one of the very few Japanese veteran naval pilots to survive the war. Along the way he gained a healthy respect for the American M4 Browning 20mm heavy machine gun, as well as escaping death by it any number of times. Some years after the end of the war and after Sei has traded in his aviator's clothes for the typical Western style business suit of the "company man," along with the abrupt shift in lifestyle, Sei is accidentally killed when he is half-crushed by a truckload of war surplus Brownings that are on their way to being scrapped. "Mr. Browning" finally got Sei, to borrow the tale's tone (again if I'm interpreting it correctly), but not anywhere near the way he was expecting. Was it a cruel twist of fate? Was "death by Browning" always in the cards for Sei? Or was something else at play here? Talk among yourselves.

While we're at it let's not overlook the two undercurrents running in this tale. Remember me warning you that Matsumoto's tales usually have one? As I said this time around there are two. The earlier and more obvious one is his pointed japs at the Japanese military industrial complex, which wound up giving the Japanese three different sizes of heavy machine gun at the same time as opposed to the Americans having one carefully chosen yet fairly good one doing pretty much the same job. The later and less obvious one is his quiet jab at the Japanese "company man" or "salaryman" to use the proper slang phrase (it's the same in Japanese), which is in what profession Lieutenant Sei finds himself after the end of the war. "It's a living," we can almost hear him say and yet it's obvious he's not a happy man. It's a means to an end, not an end in and of itself as when back in his flying days as a naval aviator. In that sense one can argue that he sees his death almost as a blessing, and the way he "gets taken out" will no doubt be the talk of the water cooler clique back at the office for days. It's not as glorious a death as dying in combat, but still ... what a way to go. (sad smile)

And now for our final tally as to how women fare in *The Cockpit* as a whole. We ended Volume 8 at 14-10-7; that is, 14 died, 10 lived, and 7 lived but were degraded (including made to get naked) or molested and in some cases abused before story's end. Let's add Volume 9's count to get those final numbers. No women in "Tracer Bullet Corridor," the museum assistant in "The Age of the Pterodactyl" burns alive (but by her own choice, I must note), Irene is presumably eaten by a jaguar "off screen" in "Blank Field Flight," neither of the wives die in "Red Skull," no women are featured in either "The Vampire's Bouquet" or "Fault Circuit," and finally while there are three women briefly shown near the end of "Low Trajectory 12.7mm" they're only background fill so we won't include them in our count. That makes for a final tally of 16-12-7 for all the women featured in all nine tankoban of *The Cockpit*. 16 died, 12 lived, and 7 lived but had, uhm, "something" happen to them during the course of the story. There are the numbers for those of you interested in them.

I hope all of you enjoyed this first initial English language trip through Leiji Matsumoto's *The Cockpit* as much as did I helping to make it possible. As I said before I'm well aware that this is not the best of translations and that my well-intentioned efforts to clean up the worst of Google Translate AI's gibberish at times may have unintentionally made things worse. That said I still hope something of the greatness of the originals survived in the translation. "I see through a glass darkly ..." as the Bible verse goes. I hope all of you forgive me if I take a break for a while. I'm not done with Leiji Matsumoto's *Battlefield* series, not by half. There's about 150 stories all told, give or take a half-dozen and depending on who does the counting and what they include or leave out. *The Cockpit* is just the first part of that complete opus. That said many consider it the best part, and you now at least have that in a readable English form where you had next to nothing before. I hope all of you appreciate my efforts and I also hope you enjoy what you can now read. I also hope it may eventually inspire those with better language skills and translation tools to do a better job than did I. Fingers crossed.

Be seeing you!
R.M.
August 2026

Tracer bullet corridor Battlefield Manga Series 9

Shonen Sunday Comics

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